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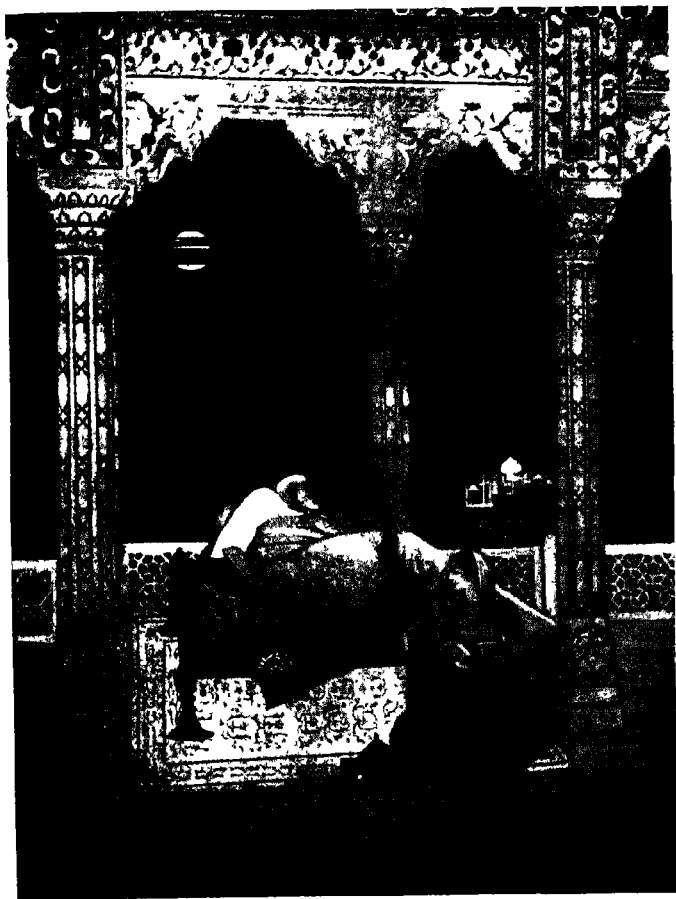
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#### THE PASSING OF SHAH IBRAHIM

*Illustration by the artist of the Shah's death in the Tur Mahal*

Shah Ibrahim is lying on the floor of the Tur Mahal, the place where he died. The illustration shows the Shah in a state of distress, with his head resting on his hand. The Tur Mahal is a highly ornate room, with intricate carvings and a high ceiling. The Shah is wearing a light-colored garment, and his expression is one of suffering. The illustration is a black and white drawing, capturing the somber mood of the scene.

# THE LAND AND LIFE OF INDIA

BY  
MARGARET READ

AUTHOR OF  
*The Indian Peasant Uprooted*  
*From Field to Factory*  
etc.



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THE LAND AND LIFE  
OF INDIA

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHEN the artists of the Middle Ages painted a great subject like the Nativity or the Madonna and Child, they often sketched in a background showing a little of the landscape, and something of the life of the people going about their ordinary work. This background achieved two ends. Its smallness and its detail made the great central subject stand out more boldly and clearly. Its touches of nature and of human life brought the great central subject close to the lives of men.

This book aspires to be like the background of the mediæval artists—a setting for a great central subject. India is a land so vast, so complex, so ancient that we of the West find it hard to understand her. Hence this “background book.” In the glimpses of the country, in the little sketches of people’s lives (the characters are all fictitious), in the glances at her ancient past, the aim is to show both how great the subject of India is, and at the same time how it is made up of the lives of men and women. This book therefore is not concerned with “problems”; they belong to other books. It is not primarily concerned with politics and economics, though it would show that in the end they are built up on human lives. It is concerned with religion, for India is a land where religious faith is expressed in every side of life, and hence there is no single chapter on religion, because it appears in them all.

Among the many obvious omissions it should be explained that I have not attempted to deal with Burma, as it is a land in many ways separate from India. If it seems that not enough has been said about the educated classes in India and about the modern movements in which they play so large a part, it is because the background of India is the life of the peasant, and this I have endeavoured to emphasize.

It is hoped that this book may be of some interest and use to all who seek an introduction to India. These may be leaders of study groups, older schoolboys and schoolgirls, or any of our forty million citizens, who through Parliament have the deciding voice in the destiny of India.

I take this opportunity of thanking the many friends who have read all or parts of this book, and who have helped with criticism and suggestions. I would like especially to thank Mrs Appadurai Aaron for her most welcome advice, and the Library staff of the Royal Empire Society for their unfailing courtesy in finding the books and documents consulted during the writing of the book.

MARGARET READ

*London, 1934*

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## DESIGNS ON JACKET

The motifs (conventionalized forms of the lotus) used in the border design are taken from the decoration of the tomb and mosque of Rani Sapri at Ahmedabad, built in 1541.

For description of silhouette, see p. 33.

# THE LAND AND LIFE OF INDIA

## CHAPTER I

### BUILDING A BRIDGE

THE old wooden bridge began to sway very slightly as the first of the men reached the middle. Soon it was swaying regularly to the steady tramp of feet. The men walked with the slow plod of the hillman carrying a load, their backs bowed, the weight of the pack resting on a leather band across the forehead.

Manilal Parekh looked up from the plans he was studying at his camp table and saw the carriers on the bridge, silhouetted against the sky. "Good, that is the last load," he said half aloud. "We can begin work to-morrow." The men came down the steep path into the construction camp, backed up against a pile of stones, eased their loads, and slowly slipped the bands off their foreheads, with many an *ai*, *ai*, and a long-drawn *aah*. *At a call from the leader they filed away up the path again towards the village, still bent as if carrying loads, but with their steps quickened by the prospect of the evening meal.*

*The young engineer went over to the dump to see that the stores were protected from the heavy night dew, and then returned to sit outside his tent. A few feet away the Jumna river rushed over its pebbly bed, making a continuous rattle and roar which was echoed*

from the steep hillsides. He turned to look over his shoulder at the tall cliffs above the dividing of the waters, and at the towering mountains beyond, shutting out all but a narrow strip of sky. The evening light caught the face of the cliff, and Manilal screwed up his eyes to see if he could make out anything on the smooth surface of the rock. Then he laughed. "I am beginning to imagine things," he thought. "No one at this distance could see those Rock Edicts. But there they have been engraved for over two thousand years."

He pulled a writing-pad from his pocket and began a letter to his father.

"I wonder if you are all back at home yet after your travels. What a great deal of India you will have seen. If Chunilal still wants to be an engineer, you had better tell him to study hard. I often wish that I had used my time better at Glasgow. For here in a job like this you are left to yourself, there is no one to consult, everything depends on your judgment, and if anything goes wrong it is your own fault. Now with this new Jumna bridge, the stuff is all here and we begin construction work to-morrow. I find myself thinking to-night of the people who will use this bridge when it is done. They are chiefly pilgrims who go to the sacred shrines where the Jumna and the Ganges flow from the glaciers. They are old India. As you know, they give weeks in the year to this pilgrimage. It costs them all their savings and it is a great physical effort for the plains people to toil up these mountain paths. And here am I, new India, an engineer trained in Glasgow, repairing the bridge so that they shall cross safely. Yet, I wonder if I am *only* new India?"

The light was going fast and the mountain air grew chill. Two servants appeared and lit a big fire of drift-wood while Manilal stood warming his hands and listen-

ing to the sound of the waters and the barking of the village dogs and the far-away howl of a jackal. He was thinking of the Rock Edicts, and of the man who had caused them to be written in stone. How he stood out in Indian history, that great emperor Asoka!<sup>1</sup> How interesting it was that after a career of military conquest he should embrace Buddhism and issue laws in which he enjoined on his subjects piety and tolerance and service to all living creatures. What a strange sequel to an active military life! As great a contrast as that between his own practical engineering and the devoted journeying of the pilgrims. Above his head the outline of the mountains was dimly visible. "There," he said half aloud, "our forefathers believed was Kailash, the abode of the gods. And this river they held to be sacred, as millions still hold to-day. We engineers know that it means life to the plains, through its canals and its irrigation works. Perhaps 'sacred' and 'life-giving' are the same thing."

He returned to his table, and by the light of a hurricane lamp continued the letter to his father.

"I have often laughed with my friends in Bombay at the ideas of the old people. We have wanted India to be up and doing: wealthy and aggressive like the western nations. Yet now I ask myself if we are not losing something of our heritage if we neglect the piety and devotion and the search for truth which characterized India in the past. . . . I must go now and study the drawings for the placing of the piles to-morrow. In this river the currents shift so often that I am not at all sure of the lie of the bed. You see, I am not forgetting my job when I write thus. I am still an engineer—B.Sc. of Bombay and Glasgow in the Public Works Department of the United Provinces. All that I am.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 69.

Yet in this place another India and another life come before me. Not the India of struggle and bitterness and strife, but the India of quiet contentment, of search for peace and truth. What has an engineer to do with that? I do not know, but I cannot refrain from thinking of it."

A faint hail sounded above the waters, and looking up he saw on the bridge, outlined against the western sky, a tall bent figure. In a short while there came into the circle of the firelight an old man in saffron-coloured robes, his hair twisted in a knot on the top of his head, a string of brown wooden beads round his neck and a begging bowl with a handle in his hand. The young man in khaki shirt and shorts salaamed. The old man leaning on his staff returned the salute, and Manilal could see that he was exhausted. "Sadhu-ji,<sup>1</sup> will you not rest here to-night? There is food and shelter and a fire, and it is another two miles up hill to the village." Slowly the old man sank upon his haunches by the fire and held out his knotted hands to the blaze, all the time saying nothing. Manilal went into the tent and brought out some cold rice that had been left for his breakfast. He knew that the old man would not touch the savoury goat curry which had been his relish, but he found some sweetmeats and bananas brought by his servants from Mussoorie. He served the old man himself and, when he had eaten, brought water from the river to pour over his hands. Silently the old man drew from the folds of his robe a gourd with a pipe stem attached, lighted it with a glowing ember from the fire, and puffed for a while contentedly. His host fell into respectful silence while he smoked three cigarettes on end. Then the sadhu cleared his throat and broke the silence.

<sup>1</sup> For explanation of this and other Indian words, see Glossary, p. 135.

"Ahé, that Mussoorie, that was an evil place, an evil place. I had thought to rest the night there in some *serai*. But I saw no *serai*. I saw only the bazaars of the white men, the soldiers of the white men, the houses of the rich rajas with silver roofs, the little carts which men pull even as horses. None gave me to eat, none asked me to rest, there was no water to drink. I came away, I could not rest there."

"And have you no *chela*, *sadhu*-ji, who would care for your needs?" asked Manilal, feeling that the old man was hardly fit to travel alone.

"Alas, he is no more. He came with me from Benares, where I began to follow the sacred way of the holy rivers. There I fell and hurt my foot. My *chela* begged for me, and some rich people in a motor car gave money, silver rupees, and we went on the *rel-ghari* to Hardwar. Perhaps that was sin, to go in the *rel-ghari* to that sacred place. In the old days men went there always on foot, braving the wild beasts of the foothills. There my *chela* was taken with a fever—a grievous illness. I had no money for the white pills to cure him, but a Jat family in the *serai* were good to us and the woman nursed him. But he died, he had no strength. And I came alone to Dehra Dun and thence here. I seek the shrine where the holy river rises."

The old man relapsed into the silence of weariness, and Manilal marvelled at the endurance which had brought him on foot up the six thousand feet of mountain side from Dehra Dun and through the hill station of Mussoorie to the Jumna crossing—a good thirty miles in all. The *sadhu* opened his eyes again and looked awhile at the camp table where the maps were spread out under the lantern. Then he said, "The gods sent you to minister

to me by this holy river. You have acquired merit, my son, for my needs were great. I have seen many like you, who have been to the schools, who toil and hurry, toil and hurry, who know many things I do not understand. But few would care for an old man. I seek peace, I have left all behind that I may find it. And if I die before I reach the sacred shrine I shall die in peace."

The stars looked down the narrow chasm between the cliffs. The old man had fallen asleep where he sat. Manilal had covered him with a rug, and had brought out his own camp bed in order to lie beside the fire and keep it alight. So old India and new India rested in the peace of the hills.

## CHAPTER II

### PILGRIMAGES

*Than longen folk to gon on pilgrimages . . .  
To serve ballows couth in sondry londes.*

CHAUCER

INDIA is a great land of pilgrimages. Since long before Chaucer and to this day pilgrims have covered the face of the land with their tracks.

As in Europe in the Middle Ages, so in India now, it is chiefly the common people who go on pilgrimage. They have heard of some holy mountain where dwells a revered hermit; they are told that the sacred waters of a river will bring absolution from sin; they have made a vow to worship at a famous temple of the god whose cult they follow. So they gather up their small savings, they prepare for the long journey, they set out in faith knowing little of the road ahead. The distances to be covered, the hardships to be endured: these have to be set against the sacred duties of piety, the blessing of the gods, the thrill of seeing new places, the widening of interests from meeting new people and seeing new customs. India is a land of great contrasts of scenery and climate, of wide differences in religion, race, language, custom. Yet to the villager on pilgrimage Mother India, uniting in herself all the varying parts, becomes a reality.

All the chief landmarks on the map of India<sup>1</sup> are connected with places of pilgrimage. The Himalayas,

<sup>1</sup> See pull-out map at end of book, and relief map, p. 15.

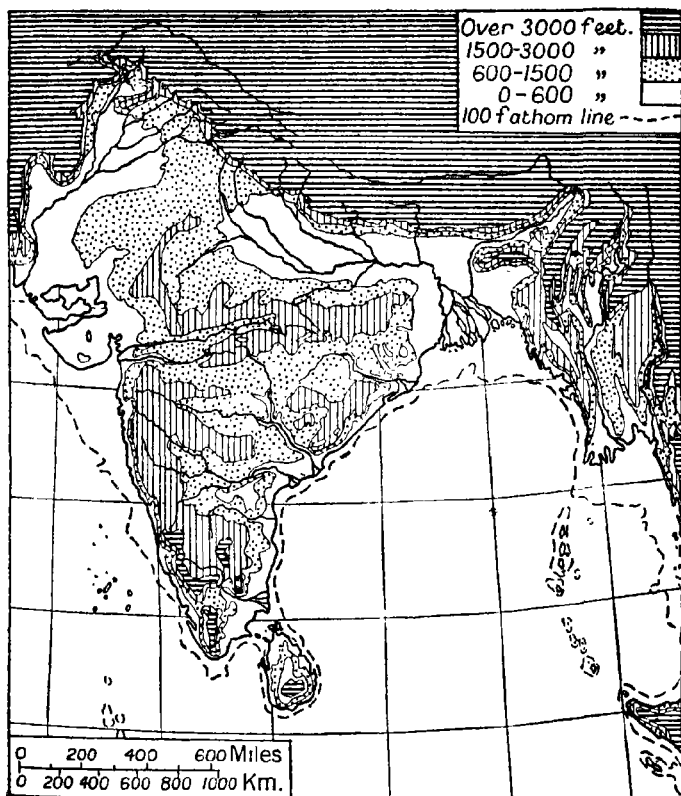


stretching like a wall across the north, have been held through the ages to be the abode of the gods. Among the unattainable snowfields the unknowable deities dwell and are worshipped from afar. Not only the two great rivers of the northern plains, the Ganges and Jumna, but also the Nerbada in Central India, and the chief rivers of the south, are sacred from their source to the ocean. From the coastal plains of the peninsula rise the Eastern and Western Ghats, the mountainous edges of the central tableland, and in their wooded ravines are many temples. Other sacred rivers or mountains are to be found all over India, for the earliest form of religion known in India was nature worship. Many temples of the later gods have been placed where formerly a sacred river or grove was worshipped. Of these more famous places of pilgrimage, names such as Benares, Puri, and Madura are known over the length and breadth of the land.

#### PILGRIMS IN SOUTH INDIA

“What is that? To Bangalore? The train comes in two hours.” The station clerk turned again to his papers, and Chinappa went out to his family. Subamma, his wife, was sitting in the shade against the wall, the gold earrings under her smooth oiled hair catching the light as she turned to give the children some *chapatis* from a bundle. She wore her dark blue *sari* over the shoulder, in the fashion of the south, and not covering her head. Round the little boy’s fat body was a loin cloth, and round his neck a charm in a cotton bag. The two little girls wore long dark blue skirts with short red jackets, and jingling earrings and ankle-rings.

Presently the clerk came out, and by way of opening



INDIA: RELIEF MAP

Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers, from *The Oxford History of India*,  
 by V. A. Smith (Clarendon Press)

conversation, pointed out the span of the big iron bridge crossing the river. "That way you go to Bangalore," he said, "over the great river."<sup>1</sup> "And do you go far?" he added politely.

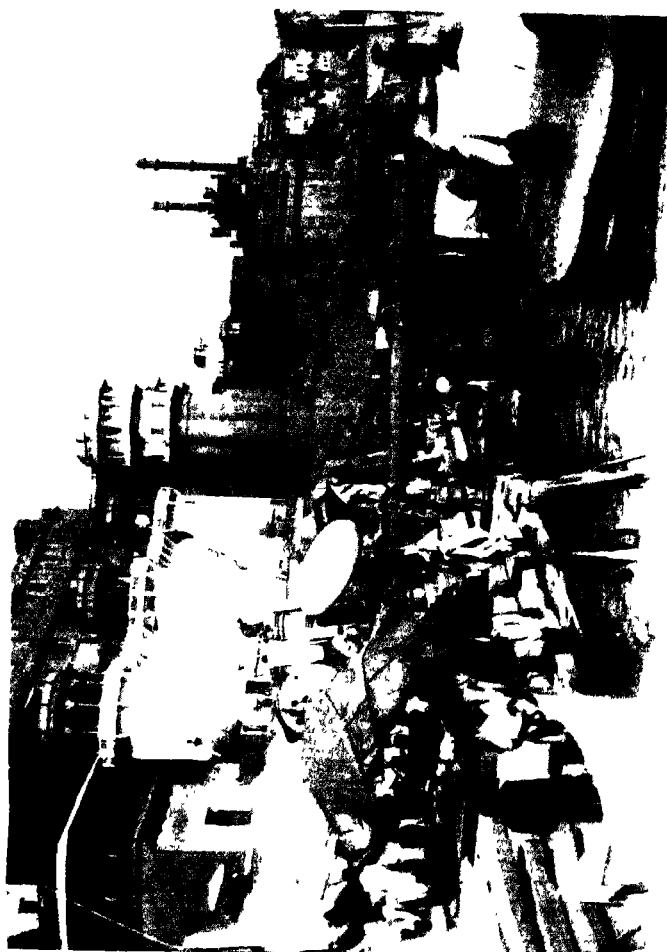
"We go to Madura," said Chinappa. "The brothers of the mother of my son live there since the famine came to this country. We go with them on pilgrimage to the town of Siva's son, to Tiruchendur."

"You will acquire great merit," said the clerk, impressed. "To go so far on pilgrimage is the act of one who is very devout."

Chinappa *was* devout. With his two brothers he farmed their ancestral land in the north of the Anantapur district. While the brothers worshipped the village gods and were content to be independent cultivators of the Kapu caste, next in rank to the Brahmins, Chinappa had other ideals. The village gods and caste customs could not hold him. He desired a more mystical religion and looked forward to the day when, his family grown up, he could retreat to a hermitage in the jungle, there to pray and meditate. In the meantime he had resolved to go on pilgrimage. Leaving the farm in charge of his brothers, he had taken all his small savings and was setting out to go over five hundred miles with his family to the famous Siva shrine.

When the train came in, Chinappa pushed his wife and the children and all their bundles into the third-class carriage. With difficulty they found places on the wooden seats already crowded with people, who had strewn the floor with tin boxes, bundles, cooking-pots, water vessels, baskets of fruit, and crawling babies. Casual conversations soon revealed the destinations

<sup>1</sup> Pennar River.





and purposes of the fellow-travellers, whether business, visiting relatives, or pilgrimage. The main talk among the men through the hot midday hours was of the state of the crops, and the chances of a good harvest.

"In my country," said a farmer who had got in at Anantapur, "we had the famine last year. Our stomachs were empty. Many had to go away to work in the towns because there was no food in the villages."

"In my country," said Chinappa, looking out at the poor red soil, the thin grass and stunted trees, "we have forests on the hills, and on the black land where I live, there is good millet and cotton. Two rows millet and one row cotton did I sow in August when the rains were heavy. And the millet harvest was good. Now my brothers pick the cotton to take to the ginning factory."

As they went farther south the country became more hilly, and the soil, though still red loam, was evidently richer. "Look, here is the 'garden of the district,'" said a much-travelled merchant. "See the areca palms and coconut palms. See the betel vines and orange trees, the tobacco and the pumpkins round the houses. In this country a man can eat well."

It was dark when the pilgrims came into Bangalore station. Alarmed at the crowds and the babel of strange languages around them, the children clung to their mother's sari and she followed close behind her husband as he went to inquire about trains. There was none until the next morning at 5 o'clock, so they prepared to spend the night at the station. Already many families were doing the same, camping on the floor of the waiting-hall. From a stall they bought parched corn and cocoanut sweetmeats, and Chinappa filled his brass drinking-cup with coffee carried by a Brahmin in copper

kettles slung from a shoulder yoke. The evening meal over, Chinappa and Subamma disposed themselves as comfortably as they could against their bundles and drew the children between them. So they slept fitfully through the noise of train whistles and station bells and crying babies and itinerant vendors' cries which punctuated the night.

From conversations in the train next morning Chinappa found that they could not get to Madura in one day, and would have to spend a night in Trichinopoly. After leaving Bangalore on the Mysore tableland, they came into new country. People were talking Tamil at the stations, and the Telugu-speaking travellers grew fewer and fewer. Chinappa soon found that, whereas few Tamil people knew Telugu, most of the Telugus who emigrated south learned to speak Tamil for daily use, while retaining Telugu as their "house language."<sup>1</sup> At Trichinopoly some Telugu fellow-travellers took them outside the station to see the great rock 300 feet high, with the temple of Siva on the summit. Chinappa would have liked to take the next day to visit it, but Subamma was afraid of the strange surroundings and unknown language, and was anxious to get quickly to her brothers in Madura.

They reached Madura at ten the next morning, having taken the mail train at 6 a.m. at Trichinopoly. Chinappa felt now that he could hand over the care of his family to his wife's relatives and devote the few days in Madura to the temple for which the town was famous. Subamma had been apprehensive of meeting the wives of her brothers, but soon found that Naraini, wife of her elder brother, was ready to take her to her heart. Her family had long been settled in Madura and she spoke both

<sup>1</sup> Census, Madras, 1931.

Tamil and Telugu, which was very helpful to Subamma and the children.

The immense scale and grandeur of the Madura temple almost overwhelmed Chinappa, accustomed only to small village shrines and to the temples in the small towns with one little tower and some carving on the front. The tall carved *gopura*, or pyramid-shaped towers, were a source of marvel to him, as were also the *mantapa* (porches), with their hundreds of pillars carved with scenes from Hindu scriptures. On the last night of their stay Subamma's elder brother took all the family to the great festival at the Teppakulam, the tank of the raft. Chinappa had seen it in daylight, a stretch of lotus-covered water with a pagoda rising in the middle, white in the sunlight as a great lotus, set on a marble platform with four small towers at the corners and a soft shading of dark green trees around. For the festival the small towers, the balustrades, the parapets and the lower part of the pagoda were outlined with thousands of small twinkling lamps which were reflected in the dark waters. Around the tank on a raft, itself a blaze of lights, floated the images of Sundareshwara, an incarnation of Siva, and his consort, Minakshi. To Chinappa the sudden appearing of the god on the water out of the dark night was a miracle. While the children and women gasped with astonishment at the lights and the gorgeous jewels on the images, Chinappa stood a little apart, bowing, murmuring the name of Siva, his hands folded before his face in the attitude of salutation.

The next day the party set out for Tinnevely en route for Tiruchendur. Chinappa and Subamma, who had felt out of their element since they left Bangalore, knew themselves now to be in an entirely strange land, more favoured by Nature, richer, greener and more watered.



All around them in the railway carriage people were talking Tamil. Many men were reading newspapers, which are very common among the Tamil-speaking people,<sup>1</sup> far more so than in their own part of the country where the literacy is only half that of the Tinnevely district.<sup>1</sup> On either side of the railway were green rice fields, interspersed with wooded hills and beautiful land-locked lakes. They had learned to their surprise that here everyone ate rice, whereas in Anantapur rice was the food only of the wealthy, the farmers living chiefly on different kinds of millet which they ground into flour.

From Tinnevely they chose to go in a motor bus the thirty-five miles to Tiruchendur, the city of Siva's son, called "the beautiful city." On the outskirts of the town they found an immense concourse of people moving along the roads. This chief pilgrim festival in February coincided with the great annual cattle fair of the district, and oxen, cows and goats were being driven along by their owners, some of them tribes noted for earning their living by stealing and selling cattle. Families walking with bundles on their heads, others in bullock carts and battered motor cars; people from North India, from Central India, from the West Coast: all mingled on the road with a holiday sense of enjoyment. Subamma and the children were thrilled at the crowds, at the wayside booths for refreshments, at the stalls of coffee and rice cakes, at the troupes of musicians singing and dancing, at the snake-charmers and conjurors ready to amuse travellers. Chinappa, however, had his gaze fixed on the tall gopuram on the sandstone bluff jutting out into the sea, a noted landmark for sailors. Below, cut out of the sandstone cliff, was the temple

<sup>1</sup> Census, Madras, 1931.

with colonnades of pillars leading to the inner shrine. As the sun went down thousands of pilgrims, Chinappa among them, bathed in the sea water sacred to Subramanya, Siva's son, who, it was believed, had returned there victorious from a fight in mid-ocean.

The next morning vast crowds of pilgrims bathed in the pathway of the rising sun. The more devout marked their foreheads with the three lines sacred to Siva, made with the white ash of burnt cow-dung. Rapt in adoration they bowed, repeating five times the sacred five syllables "*Nāmasivāya*" ("Hail to Siva"). Many pilgrims carried to the temple costly offerings of jewels and gold in fulfilment of a vow. Others, like Chinappa, bought garlands of jasmine and oleander in the bazaar to lay before the shrines and to hang on the tall votive lamps. Subamma, from her village home where so little money was used, was amazed at the wealth flowing in and out of the city, and alarmed at the daily outlay on rice and vegetables for their meals. Once she attempted to protest to her husband. "Why do you spend so much money on garlands? Who can eat garlands? Not even the priests, and look how wealthy they are. See how they are given money and jewels. Why do you give every day to that one-armed beggar on the steps? Everyone gives to him and to all the other beggars. They have more than we have. See how our money goes. We shall not have enough to get home."

Chinappa turned to her patiently, but decisively. "Cease, woman. What do you know of holy giving? Who knows what these gifts may bring of merit?"

When the time came to go home Subamma's forebodings were justified, for the money had run very short. Chinappa had lingered on at Tiruchendur because he

had found a new interest. Two Indian Christians stood daily in the outer court of the temple, speaking with the pilgrims who came and went, selling Gospels in Tamil and Telugu. One of them, a young padre, had worked in the Telugu country, and he gave Chinappa a Gospel of John in Telugu. When Chinappa read the story of Nicodemus he felt that here was a picture of himself, thirsting for eternal life. Where could he find it? In the *bhakti* worship, the personal devotion of a Hindu to a god? Questions like this he put to the Christian preacher, and when the latter suggested that Chinappa might come to a Christian festival to be held near at hand, he agreed, and announced to his family that the next day they would start. Naraini was keen to go, because she had been educated in a Christian school and liked the Christians she had known. Subamma was anxious about the money and longed to be at home again.

To the "Village of the Good News" therefore the little party went, walking along the tree-bordered roads where the paddy-birds flew in swift white flashes from palm to palm, and the crimson saris of the women carrying brass water-pots on their heads stood out against a background of vivid green. Near the village they found another pilgrim throng on the roads, going to the Christian harvest festival. Chinappa was amazed at the stone churches and at the general orderliness of the Christian villages. In this district so many were Christians that it could be said that the countryside had a distinctive "Christian atmosphere."<sup>1</sup>

Outside a big stone church a huge *pandal* stood, a palm leaf roof with open sides. Here the people brought their offerings: grain, chicken, goats and sheep. But there were no rich priests receiving the gifts. The

<sup>1</sup> Census, Madras, 1931.

Christians were dedicating the firstfruits of their harvest to God the Creator, and giving them to build new churches and schools and hospitals. Although Chinappa could not follow the Tamil addresses, he could appreciate the deep devotion of the services. Most of all was he impressed with the culminating service of the festival when over three thousand people listened to a simple address on the goodness of God, and joined in singing Christian lyrics which they all knew by heart. Many times he talked with the young Indian padre who spoke Telugu, and who seemed to understand his longing after communion with God.

Back at Madura, where they borrowed money for the homeward journey, Chinappa felt as though he had indeed been on pilgrimage. He had seen and learned much, and no longer thought of his own part of the country as the centre of everything. Most of all, he had experience of a wide circle of devout souls uniting in their search for holiness and truth.

#### PILGRIMS IN NORTH INDIA

"Greeting, sister. Here is the second dawn of our journey and we are a stage further on, for here is Bombay."

A thin little woman wrapped in a widow's coarse white cotton sari, devoid of any colour or ornament, drew near to the ship's rail. The speaker, her brother, Mohan Parekh, was wearing the usual dress of his calling, a *dhoti* with a long tightly buttoned white coat over it, and a pink turban of closely rolled folds of muslin. Beside him stood his only son, Naoroji, a slim boy of eighteen, whose hollow cheeks and frequent cough marked him as a consumptive.

The sun was rising, a huge red ball, over the island of Bombay, making the innumerable creeks look like flaming tongues licking the land. The liner drew slowly into the harbour, passing the Gateway of India, a massive stone archway crowning the docks. Ahead was a huge luxury liner, filled with round-the-world tourists. In their wake was a small coasting steamer, her decks thronged with peasants from the Deccan coming to work in the cotton mills. Ferry boats and small tugs went to and fro across the waters crowded with pleasure yachts, fishing-boats with square mat sails, and craft of all kinds. As the ship came to her moorings she was invaded by a horde of dock workers, pushing, jostling, shouting, clamorous to carry baggage and to handle the cargo.

"Salaam, brother." It was Mohan's brother, Motilal, who was greeting him, bowing with the customary salutation of the two hands folded together before the face. With Motilal was his young son, Chunilal, aged eleven, who wore a small flat black cap, and his two daughters, Ratan and Lakshmi, of twelve and nine, dressed in brown silk saris draped over their heads, with gaily coloured woven borders forming a square cape behind.

The Parekhs were an orthodox Hindu family belonging to the Vania caste, one of the banking castes of Western India. From their original home in Surat, Mohan had gone to settle in Karachi, Motilal in Bombay. Mohan had remained orthodox, and disliked modern ways of thinking and acting. Motilal, who had been elected a member of the Legislative Council in Bombay, had adopted many new ways of living, including a modern education for his daughters, and had sent his eldest son, Manilal, to take his degree in Britain. Business was demanding that the brothers should visit

Calcutta, where their firm had a branch. Mohan wished very much to make a pilgrimage to Benares on the way, and as it was the year of the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad, the festival which falls only once in every twelve years, he wanted to go there too. His motives for going on pilgrimage were several. He wanted to express his piety and devotion ; he sought blessing on his business affairs ; he hoped for a cure from the sacred waters for his consumptive son ; and his widowed sister had long wished to make the pilgrimage to Benares, but could not go without escort. His brother Motilal had agreed to join him, feeling frankly less pious and devout about the pilgrimage, but anxious to give his children an opportunity of seeing the country and the sacred cities of India. As they were wealthy pilgrims they travelled first-class in the train from Bombay to Allahabad, a journey which took two nights and a day.

From the balcony of their lodgings in Allahabad they could see the wide sandy stretch between the two sacred rivers where the Kumbh Mela was being held. "Look, look, Ratan," Chunilal cried. "Here is a procession of holy men going by. See how the crowds draw back to let them pass. Look at their banners and their matted hair. Oh, and see how the beggars by the roadside stretch out their hands to them. How I wish Manilal were here instead of building that bridge in the hills. He would take me out down to the riverside."

Just then Naoroji came to join them after bathing in the river. His hair was damp, his narrow shoulders were shivering. While his aunt hastened to make him some hot tea, he told his cousins of his experiences. "I never thought I should pass through the crowds. Thousands of pilgrims are jostling and struggling to

get to the water. When the big processions of holy men, the *akharas*, come along, there is order, for the police do not allow one procession to cross another. Each group has its own camping ground, and one may visit them to make offerings and to hear the sacred books read."

"But the waters?" asked his aunt. "Did you bathe where the holy Jumna and Ganges mingle, and did your spirit perceive the third holy river, the Sabarmati?"

"I heard the pilgrims say the names of the three rivers as they bent to wet their heads, and as they lifted the water in their hands."

"But tell us," broke in Lakshmi. "Did you hear many people speaking Gujarati, our language? Where do all these pilgrims come from?"

"Truly, all India is here," rejoined Naoroji. "And we are not one people but many. We cannot understand each other in this place. Each speaks to his friend in his own language. You can see what strange clothes they wear. Father and uncle can tell what part of India the people come from by their clothes. Some even are from the South, and they do not know any Hindustani."<sup>1</sup>

From Allahabad the party went by motor to Benares, along the Grand Trunk Road. Here was a pilgrim way indeed, with hundreds walking under the broad shady trees, and every kind of conveyance stirring up the thick dust of the road. Bullock carts lurched slowly along, some closely covered, while from within came a shrill chatter of women's voices and bright eyes peeped through holes in the matting shelter. Now and then a camel cart came in sight, its long shafts

<sup>1</sup> The *lingua franca* of North India.

sloping at a precarious angle up to the camel's back, the flapping white curtains disclosing a group of veiled women from the Punjab. Near Benares the Parekhs saw a little knot of people at the roadside gathered round an old man in the yellow robes of a sadhu who was seated on the dusty brown grass. Before him stood a small boy, clad in a loin cloth and a top-heavy turban. As the motor drew up beside them he was addressing the bystanders: "I tell you he cannot *walk*—it was the big bull in the narrow street which caused him to fall. It may be merit to be hurt by the holy bull of Siva, but I tell you," in a shrill voice, "he cannot *walk*, and how shall we get to Hardwar? Look," he added, holding out the begging bowl, "this is all I have received to-day, this handful of corn. Indeed, we might go by the rel-ghari if we received money from the pious, but we cannot buy a ticket for the rel-ghari with *this*."

Mohan leaned out of the car and asked a few questions of the onlookers. He pulled some rupees from his pocket and gave them to the chela, saying: "Here is money for the railway. Go in peace." As the car went on he added to his brother, by way of explanation, "If we have money to go on pilgrimage in comfort, we should at least give some to that sadhu, for he has travelled far on foot and has acquired great merit."

The first morning in Benares the Parekh family set out to perform their religious duties. The men and boys went to be shaved by one of the many barbers squatting under great umbrellas by the river-side. Then they bathed, repeating verses of the Vedas, lifting the water in their hands and bowing reverently. Thousands of their fellows bathed beside them, ignoring each other, all intent on their devotions. As they



stood on the flight of steps leading to the river, Motilal gazed at the temples which seemed to jostle each other into the water, and at the pilgrims from every corner of India seeking salvation in the holy Ganges. "I wonder," he said to Mohan, "what most of them are thinking? When they call on Brahma, Vishnu, or Siva, do they think of them as the Creator, the Preserver, the Destroyer? Or do they worship the one God? Some, I suppose, are philosophers seeking truth and goodness; some are devotees, seeking union with the beloved; some I should call idolaters, worshipping Siva's bull or a dancing Kali."

"I think," said Mohan, who was matter of fact and not speculative, "most of them seek to acquire merit so that in their next incarnation they may have a good *karma*<sup>1</sup> awaiting them. Others who may have broken the law of *dharma*, of obedience to caste rules, seek expiation."

"You can see here," said Motilal, "how Hinduism has absorbed all the earlier faiths of the land, accepting the nature gods and the good and bad spirits, so that as a religion it appeals through its symbols to the ignorant villager, and through its philosophy to the learned and the saints."

Meantime the women of the family, covering their faces from the bold glances of the passers-by, made their way, escorted by a servant, through the narrow streets, pushing past huge Brahmani bulls. They went first to the temple of the goddess Durga, consort of Siva, to take offerings of flowers and *ghi*, and then to the women's bathing *ghat* where they bathed. On their return they saw an old woman being carried in a litter, her emaciated form telling of life nearly ended,

<sup>1</sup> Fate.

her eyes straining to catch a glimpse of the sacred water. "They will lay her down with her feet in the water," said the aunt to Ratan in an awestruck voice. "She will die, but in the holy river her body will be purified, and after the burning her ashes will be cast into the waters. Down there," she said, pointing to a wider street, "is the burning ghat. See the fires that rise, the priests who perform the rites. How happy," she added fervently, "are they who die by Mother Ganges ! How I wish I could die here, purified from sin in the holy river."

"But, Aunt," broke in Ratan, "you do not want to die yet. You must come with us and see the sights and then go home to Karachi and tell everyone what you have seen. What good is it to travel unless you go home to talk about it ?"

From Benares they took the evening train for Calcutta, and in the early morning saw they had come into another land. No longer did they look on the bare brown plains of the North, nor on the rough jungle-covered hills of Central India, but on a green land, dense with vegetation. After the brothers had accomplished their business in Calcutta, they all left by boat for Madras. There they found a city of wide spaces, which had in fact been several villages joined together ; a long stretch of sea beach fronting the town, large buildings set in gardens, and little of the commercial ugliness and noise which mark large parts of Calcutta and Bombay.

After their journey home by rail across the tableland of the Deccan they were all content with their travels. The brothers had done their business successfully and the children had enjoyed the new places ; but only the old aunt carried with her a jar of Ganges water to place

on a shelf in her room as a remembrance of her pilgrimage.

#### PILGRIM WAYS

As Hindus go to Hindu sacred places, so also do Moslems, Sikhs and Jains to theirs. The seasons of the various festivals cause an almost ceaseless stream of pilgrims from one part of India to another. Those who go on pilgrimage find new interests and a religion which is wider than that of their local shrines. "The sanctity of the shrines beyond the border competes with those at home."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the dullness and routine of village life is exchanged for the enlivenment of wandering players, musicians and story-tellers who join the pilgrim throngs. On the pilgrim trains, in the courts of temples, on the bathing ghats are "living newspapers," with news to be handed from one to another and rumours true and false to be spread.

In the great pilgrimages is seen the paradox about India which western people find so difficult to resolve. On the one hand is the great diversity between the different parts of the country, North and South, East and West, hill and plain, seen in language, customs, dress, and many other ways. On the other hand is a unity: the religious object of the pilgrimage. Before the shrine of Siva or in the holy Ganges, people from many parts of India mingle as one.

<sup>1</sup> Census, U.P., 1931.

### CHAPTER III

#### VILLAGE LIFE

“ARÉ! ARÉ! Do you not know your master who speaks? Have you forgotten your country?” Jaya Ram thus addressed the bullocks, prodding them with his heel until they came to a standstill. The boys ran to the heads of the bullocks, and, seizing the wooden yoke, tugged and pushed till they turned off the main road into a track between the fields.

Jaya Ram and Tulsi Ram, his brother, were Hindu cultivators of the Jat caste in the western Punjab. With their widowed sister they had been on a pilgrimage to Hardwar, the holy city where the Ganges breaks through the Siwalik hills to enter the plains of India. They had travelled by train as far as the nearest railway station ten miles off from their village. From there they had expected to walk. They were met with the bullock cart, however, by their two sons, Sohan and Kishon, who announced with some pride that they had earned money by carting cotton to the railway. The cotton had been picked in December just before the sugar-cane was cut, and had been in the ginning mill in the neighbouring small town awaiting carting. It was now the middle of February. The brothers before leaving had seen their winter crops harvested and the seed sown for the hot weather crops, and had so managed to leave their fields for a short time to make the long desired pilgrimage to Hardwar.

The road they followed was known locally as “the

road to Talwara," but there had been no attempt to make a road otherwise than by continuous use of the same winding track between the fields. It consisted of a series of deep ruts, with here and there large holes where solid wooden wheels had stuck in the rains. As the cart lurched and bumped along, the brothers commented on the state of the crops since their departure.

"Krishna Lal has a good wheat crop. . . . He has taken more care of it than he did of his sugar-cane. But he must weed his fields. Look how the weeds grow. He is a lazy man. He sits smoking his hookah when he should be watering his fields."

"And the mother of his son," echoed their sister from the interior of the cart, "she does not help him. She is like a Rajput woman. She sits in her house all day. If he is idle, it is because she is idle. For how says the proverb—'A careless wife makes a lazy husband-man.'"

"Hi! Hi! make a way, make a way." Rattling down the track came a country cart, studded with brass and gaily painted, driven by a very fat man perched up on the small seat like Humpty Dumpty. The bullocks were pushed to one side, almost crushing against the bank of thorns which protected the field from wandering cattle. As the fat man passed he whipped up his two scraggy ponies, and the cart leaped forward rocking and bumping. Jaya Ram spat vehemently into the dust. Tulsi glared at the departing figure and scowled. "A curse be on him and on his ways. He is a blood-sucker, a snake in the grass. He comes here for no good. All he wants is to press us for money as he squeezes us against these thorns. May his cattle die!"

"You say truly, brother," said Jaya Ram. "What landlord is any good who only comes to rob? Does

he give us help in bad harvests? No. Does he give money to our temple? No. Does he help anyone but himself? No. May his sons fall on evil days!"

Harish Chandra was the hated landowner of a large part of the district. He was not a Jat as were most of the cultivators. He lived in the town and sent agents to collect rents, instructing them to use all possible means of squeezing the peasantry. His own rare visits to the villages generally spelt trouble for some hard-working farmer, who had no means of getting his own back save by curses.

The cultivated fields ended in a grove of trees sloping to the river Beas. The track wound through some rough scrub land up to a slight eminence where the roofs of the village could be seen. The sun was getting low, its level rays with long shadows piercing the haze of dust. Half a dozen little children were bringing home the village cattle with an occasional call of "Aré, sister. Come, sister." The boys wore diminutive loin-cloths, enormous folded turbans, and carried long switches over their shoulders; some were munching sticks of sugar-cane. The little girls, in full skirts to their ankles, carried bundles of firewood or fodder on their heads. The cattle, bony hipped and thin flanked, trailed wearily along behind the children.

Pointing to some low bushes, Kishon said: "There, O father, was a deed done last night—a deed of shame and of sin. Jaimul came out to look at his cattle, and when the boys came home he stayed behind. *He sold his sick cow*" (in a breathless whisper) "to a Chamar waiting on the edge of the jungle. They say there will be much talk about it in the panchayet. Is that not a deed of shame?"

The brothers talked about the enormity of this sale

as they urged the bullocks up the stony track to the entrance of the village. The first houses they passed were tumbledown huts with the mud walls crumbling, the thatch broken and drooping, and no raised verandas in front. Piles of refuse were lying about where thin cringing dogs were nosing and whining.

"Truly, *this* is a deed of shame," grumbled Jaya Ram, "that we Jats must enter our village past these Chamars' huts. Their houses are foul, their women neglect to sweep."

"Peace, brother," said Tulsi, "have a care lest they hear thee. For if we anger them, who will make our shoes for us? Who will remove our dead cattle? Who will attend our wives at birth? Thou knowest how they refuse to work for those who anger them." The Chamars or leather-workers were the lowest caste in the village, part of the community, essential because of the services they rendered, yet despised because they handled dead animals.

In the village itself the track turned and twisted where householders had encroached on it to take in an extra bit for their veranda or their cattle shed. An open drain ran down one side, partly choked here and there with refuse and fallen stones. There was only just room for the cart and bullocks to pass along. Any passers-by had to step aside and flatten themselves against the walls of the houses made of yellowed mud, some roofed with brown thatch, some with dark red tiles.

Presently the cart arrived at a doorway in a mud wall, and with much pushing and grunting the bullocks were turned so that they could enter, the hubs of the wheels deepening the groove in the mud of the doorposts. To the right and left of the entrance were covered verandas, and in front an open courtyard. The cattle sheds were

on one side, verandas leading to inner rooms on the other two. Sohan unyoked the cattle and let the heavy shaft of the cart fall on the hard floor with an echoing bang that brought a little dried-up woman out from the dim recesses of the veranda. The widowed sister got down slowly, cramped from the long hours of crouching in the cart. With great care she lifted down her precious brass pot of Ganges water and went through the veranda to the sleeping-rooms beyond to place the jar on a shelf. The old woman followed her carrying the bundle of bedding which she spread on a *charpoy*.

At that moment through the gateway came Jaya Ram's wife, bending so as to pass under the lintel, with two brass water-pots on her head, one fitting into the neck of the other. Tulsi's wife was close behind her. Both women were tall, erect and strong-looking. They wore full skirts of dark blue cotton which swung as they walked, many brass ankle-rings, tight-fitting cotton bodices, and brightly coloured head cloths covering their hair and tucked in at their waists. As they put their water jars on the wooden rack in the courtyard, their husbands, who had been looking round their domain, announced in commanding tones, "We go to bathe. Now do not stay and gossip. Do you not know your lords are hungry? Therefore make food quickly."

The women had hundreds of questions burning on their tongues, but they dared not stay to talk. While the men had gone to bathe at the village well and the boys to water the cattle the evening meal must be prepared. The old aunt, crouching by the mud cooking-stoves, scraped together the smouldering embers, dropped a chip or two of wood on them and, when the flames appeared, broke up flat fuel cakes made of dried cow-dung, fanning them with a little square grass fan. The



elder wife went to the corn bins in the veranda, deep chests made of mud plastered with cow-dung and decorated in red and yellow clay with peacocks and elephants. From the smallest bin she took some flour already ground, and then filled a clay pot with water. At the fireplace they mixed the dough, patted it into flat cakes or chapatis and laid them on a sheet of iron to bake. The younger wife was chopping vegetables, egg plant and chillies and young green mustard leaves, holding the chopping-board with her feet and pressing the vegetables on the curved knife. The vegetables were put in an iron pot containing ghi and powdered curry. Before cooking, a little ghi was sprinkled on the fire as an offering. Soon an appetising smell of frying rose in the air.

In a Hindu household cooking is a sacred task and is always performed by the women of the family. To them also falls the duty of apportioning the food and seeing that the supply of cooked food does not run short. For these reasons, therefore, Hindu wives always serve their husbands and menfolk at meals and do not take their own food until afterwards. Often the women give part of their food to a beggar in fulfilment of the sacred duty of almsgiving to the poor.

When the men returned it was almost dark. They sat on the edge of the veranda where the light lingered, squatting comfortably on their haunches. They were joined by an old man, their father's brother. There was no attempt at grouping round a common centre. Each man sat where he chose, his back to the rest, waiting lordlike to be served. Presently the women set before each a brass dish containing hot curried vegetables and a pile of chapatis. The men broke off a piece of chapati, pinched a bit of the curry between it, and jerked it with

a quick movement into their mouths. The women crouched in the rear, cooking fresh chapatis, pile after pile. Darkness fell suddenly, and the elder wife lit with an ember from the fire a twist of cotton floating in a small boat-shaped saucer of oil, which stood in a niche in the wall above the cooking-place.

At last the men pushed the brass plates away, breathed heavily once or twice, sucked their fingers, and drew nearer together. The old uncle produced the hookah, a pipe with a long stem coming through a bowl of water. Lighting it with an ember from the fire, he took a long puff through his cupped hand, not touching the mouth-piece of the pipe with his lips, and handed it to the next man. While the men were sharing the hookah in the front of the veranda, the women and children in the rear fell eagerly on what was left of the food. Still a respectful silence was preserved. Finally Jaya Ram stood up and stretched himself. "We go to eat the air."<sup>1</sup> Stepping out into the courtyard the men put on their shoes and filed out of the gateway. No sooner were they gone than a babel of questions broke out among the women. "Now tell us everything. How was Hardwar? What did you see? How was the train? What did you pay for your tickets? Did the priests receive much money? What ornaments did the women in Hardwar wear? Whom did you see on the road? What did they talk about? Had everyone heard of Talwara, our village?"

Meantime the men walked slowly, with a swelling sense of importance, to the head of the village street, where a broad-armed pipal tree rustled in the moonlight. Beside it was the *chaupal*, the village meeting-place, a roofed mud platform with a smaller room behind.

<sup>1</sup> "to take the air."

On the platform all the village men were gathered, the Jat farmers in front, the rest fading away in degrees of importance to the young men and youths on the edge, where also were to be found the village artisans—the carpenter, the smith, the potter. Beyond them some young boys sat on their haunches, gazing up at the great ones. Everyone knew that there were two important things on hand to-night: the sale of Jaimul's cow, and the return from pilgrimage of Jaya Ram and Tulsi Ram.

Good manners forbade any public notice being taken of the pilgrims' return. Nevertheless, a silence that was a tribute to their presence fell over the assembly as they took their places with the customary salaam and the greeting, "May you live." Presently an old man cleared his throat and began:

"You know, O men of Talwara, that a deed of shame has been done here. It is against our caste rules to sell a sick cow to a Chamar. Behold, if the cow dies, the Chamar must come and remove the carcase. But while it lives, our religion tells us to venerate it and care for it. To sell a living cow is a fearful thing. What do you counsel? Shall Jaimul pay a high fine? How can he make restitution to our village and to our caste?"

"We know that he is a poor man," said another. "He sold his cow because he had no money to buy seed. If he pays a big fine he must borrow seed from the corn merchant. And at harvest time the corn merchant will come to the threshing floor and take from him thirty pounds of grain to the rupee, having lent to him at the rate of only ten pounds to the rupee." A murmur of assent arose. Then silence fell again.

"We know that his cow had been ill for many months. It gave no milk, it only ate and ate. All the time his

wife was seeking fodder for it. It was no good save for its hide. And has not the Lat Sahib<sup>1</sup> given an order that sick cows must be killed lest they make other cows also sick?" Murmurs of disapproval from the older men greeted this daring remark. Then one old man said, "It is our custom, and we must follow it, that we care for our cows as for ourselves. When they are sick we do not butcher them for mere gain. We must follow dharma, the law of righteousness. In that path lies life. Who then shall tell us to change our customs? What evil may befall if we leave the ways of our fathers?" Round and round the question was debated, some being for mercy, some for science, and some for orthodoxy. At last the topic died down without any decision, everyone knowing that it would certainly recur.

Jaya Ram cleared his throat and began in a self-consciously gruff voice. "It is not good that men should live only to eat, to beget children, to die. Behold, our life is known to the gods, and we must pay them respect if we would live well. Consider our temple. How small it is compared with great temples! Yet does it not hold the sacred image of Krishna who guards our cattle? Should we not paint it anew, making it white, with red patterns on the doorway? And should we not have a brass bell to wake our god? Does he listen to a conch shell? Do you not think that our village, and after all it is not a small village"—puffing out his chest with pride—"could have a priest to care always for the temple? We would give him some fields for his food, and cultivate them for him. Then might our god be pleased, and our cattle and our crops be blessed, and in the country men would say, 'Talwara is an important village. Though they have no Brahmin

<sup>1</sup> Governor.

families, they have their own Brahmin priest who lives there.' ”

As Jaya Ram made his pious speech, a picture rose before the eyes of the listeners of their little temple on the side of the river with neem and pipal trees to shade it, and the Beas flowing below. It was only a temple in miniature, with a curved roof and two small spires going up from it, and a flight of steps in front where the faithful laid their offerings. In the dark interior an image of Krishna dancing shone with the ghi that had been rubbed on him, while garlands of marigolds hung from his neck and a small boat-shaped lamp lay at his feet. When Jaya Ram had finished talking, some of them saw a vision of a hut under the neem tree and a priest sitting before it, receiving offerings from the villagers, ringing a brass bell, washing and tending the image daily, reading aloud from the *Ramayana*. Thus did the priest in their neighbouring village, a much larger one than Talwara, where lived several Brahmin families, some Moslems, and a number of artisan castes.

The village headman spoke then, this being an important occasion when his opinion was demanded. “The same thought has often come to me. I have said in my heart, ‘Is it enough that our two *prohits*<sup>1</sup> live here?’ It is true that they can read omens, and tell us the favourable day for weddings, and walk round the village boundaries to keep away evil spirits. But they do not serve our god as a special priest would do. It is true also that pundits come sometimes and read to us the sacred books, the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad-gita*. Yet they do not serve our god. Those who have been on pilgrimage to sacred shrines”—here all eyes turned towards Jaya Ram and Tulsi Ram, for

<sup>1</sup> family priests.

this was the public recognition of their act of piety—"they know how many priests there are in great temples, and how the gods are honoured. We are not beasts to live for food and for begetting. We are men to live to honour the gods."

Grunts of approval met his speech and muttered conversations began in corners of the assembly. Then a bold modernist spoke up: "It is true that we men do not live only for food and for begetting. But to keep a priest here will cost many rupees. We do not grudge offerings to the gods. We are pious people, we Jats. But how can we spare money and food for one who will have a large mouth, we who often have not enough food for the mouths of our children?" This speech provoked a long discussion on piety versus economy, on laying up merit for the future compared with having enough to eat in the present.

They were far from a decision when up the street came a man with his head drooping and shoulders bent forward, the picture of dejection. He took his place near the headman, accepted a puff from the hookah, and began his story in a plaintive minor key: "How is a man to live? I have seen to-day the moneylender in Alwar, he who lent me three hundred rupees for the wedding of my daughter and two hundred rupees for the funeral of the mother of my son. He now says that there is a new interest which I must pay. A man borrows some money for his needs, and before he can pay it back, behold the debt has become twice as big."

"Harish Chandra was here to-day," said the village keeper of records, addressing the latest comer. "He says that land by the river is not yours. He says my records are wrong and that he will go to court to prove it." The unfortunate man broke into vehement curses

at this added misfortune, and discussion grew hot and angry round the questions of land and rent and debts incurred.

It was evident from the discussion that the ownership and use of land and practical questions of how to live were on the whole more absorbing than caste rules and pious observances. All the farmers acknowledged their poverty. All spoke of the uncertainty of crops. Some attributed it to vagaries of the weather, some to karma, a few to the failure of the village to carry out more irrigation work. They pointed out that they could only eat barley, grain and millet. They must sell their wheat, their best crop, in the market to raise money for taxes. One farmer expressed the general feeling when he said, "Our fields may bear so that we may fill our bellies, but how much more do we need to sell in the market, and so have money to pay our taxes, to buy baskets, cotton cloth for clothes, and jewellery for our wives? We are not all like Jodha yonder who sits on his veranda and weaves his own baskets. Ho, Jodha, weaver of bamboo!" A titter of amusement went round the assembly, but in spite of it Jodha spoke up for himself: "The co-operative sahib<sup>1</sup> says to us, 'Make your own baskets and save money.' I make mine. You laugh and call me a weaver. But I tell you that I have paid back my debt to the moneylender. The co-operative sahib says also, 'Do not spend so much money on weddings and funerals. Save your money to buy new cattle, new ploughs.' Perhaps he is right. Which is better—jewellery on our daughters' heads or new ploughs? Who knows?"

Jaya Ram spoke then of the many new ways of farming which he had seen on his travels. All listened with

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 152-153.

attention and respect to his curious tales of heavy ploughs, of big stone houses, of vegetable gardens and fruit orchards, of handicrafts practised in villages and sold in towns. But they sounded to them like travellers' tales. A few bold spirits were interested in the new ideas and were ready to make changes. The majority, however, agreed that new ways were not for their village—the old were better.

Next morning the earliest rays of the sun were glinting on the water channels of the Beas as the women gathered on the edge of the river to bathe and fill their water-pots. When all the big brass pots were full they stood around to gossip, looking across the fields to the big irrigation well where the bullocks were at work walking up and down, up and down, a little slope, while the water gushed out in the irrigation channels which made fertile the higher land above the river. The talk of the women was a mixture of grumbles and gossip, the latter reflecting the discussions on the chaupal of the night before, bits of which had been recounted to them by the small boys.

"They talk, they talk," said one of the women, holding her baby on her hip and pushing back the head cloth from her forehead. "And we work and work, and no one listens to us."

"We work?" echoed another. "That *is* true speech. Did I not get up this morning two hours before sunrise to sweep the courtyard, to plaster the floors with wet cow-dung and ashes, to grind corn?"

"Wah, to grind corn," broke in another. "Every day, every day, we must grind," and she hummed a refrain from one of the well-known grinding-songs. "And then are there not fuel cakes to make? We must collect cow-dung, and pat the cakes flat between our



hands, and plaster them on the side of the wall to dry, and afterwards collect them."

"And take out food to the men in the fields, and work there too when there is work for us like picking cotton."

"And carry water," added another, lifting the heavy pot to her head and balancing another on her hip.

"Yet there are places," said a younger woman, "where women do not work in the fields, where they stay all day in the house." This reminder of the great difference between the two castes of Jats and the Rajputs in that part of the Punjab set all the women's tongues wagging, and in shrill voices they argued the merits of hard work and freedom versus less hard work and being secluded in *purdah*.

One of the women who had laid down her baby under a bush went over to fetch him. Another asked her, "Does your son grow fat?" "He does not," said the mother sadly, "every day he becomes more thin. See his legs," and she showed the little sticks of skin and bone. "Indeed, the evil eye is upon him, although I call him ugly names and speak roughly to him so that the spirits may think I do not love him and may depart from him."

"When the evil eye is on our children they cannot get well," said Jaya Ram's wife, looking round fearfully as she spoke. "Yet perhaps the gods will grant that my son Kishon will recover from the cough, thanks to the holy water of Mother Ganges which his aunt has brought."

Two women who stood a little apart from the rest bent forward. "It is better," said one, "to bear children who are ill than not to bear. Daily my husband reproaches me that I am barren. There will be no son

to close his eyes, to place fire on his dead body, to inherit his land. Ah me, I am unhappy."

"Yes, truly," said the other, "and have we not consulted the family priests; have we not put ghi and rice before Krishna; did we not go to the shrine of Kali, the great mother, and sprinkle rice before her? Have not we laid stones at the foot of the pipal tree, have we not tied cloth on the twigs of the women's tree? Yet we are barren."

A woman came along the path to the river, hurrying and anxious. Without waiting to fill her pots, she blurted out her news. "The sickness is in the sweepers' huts," she said, pointing to the cluster of huts belonging to the outcastes, some distance from the village. An exclamation of horror arose from the women. "The sickness" was the dreaded smallpox. What should be done to appease Sitala Devi, the smallpox goddess? One suggested that the family priests should sacrifice to the village boundary gods to protect the village and keep out the sickness. Another reminded them of an old neglected shrine, a block of dark stone splashed with vermilion under a rough shelter on the edge of the jungle. Might not that older god have power over the dread disease?

Then a younger woman, recently come to the village, spoke up: "I was last week visiting my mother. In our village there was a pundit who was wise in the new medicine. He had a tent under the trees. He pulled out teeth, he opened the eyes of a blind man, he cured the sores on the leg of a boy. He did wonderful things. I heard him tell a woman that he could cure her of being barren if she would go to hospital. After the healing, his helpers sang some *bhajans* and he showed some pictures, and told of a great pundit who taught about

the gods and who also healed people." Many questions were asked, but the woman could not answer them. She could only say what she had seen. The older women were doubtful about this new medicine. Was it worth while to brave the dangers of the hospital, even for a barren woman to bear a son? Did not their mothers teach them the use of herbs from the jungle? And did not the gods hear devout prayers? And was not sickness sent by them? And was not karma inescapable? Who knew what witchcraft or bad spirits might be in this new medicine?

In single file, bearing the water-pots on their heads, they walked back to the village to take up the day's round. They might grumble every day, they might ask many questions and find few answers, but all the time food must be prepared and work done. There was no escape from the continuous daily toil.

### A LAND OF VILLAGES

Talwara is typical of a small village of Jat cultivators in the western Punjab. Other villages may be more mixed in castes, larger or smaller in population, on richer or poorer land. All these variations, however, and the many obvious differences to be seen in the five hundred thousand villages of India, are little more than external. Whether the people live behind mud walls or palm mats, whether they cultivate dry plains or steamy rice lands, whether they eat rice or chapatis—there are certain fundamental features which are the same for all villages. And because eighty-nine per cent of India's population, that is, 313,858,560 people, live in villages, there are certain underlying truths which can be stated for a great part of the land.

Village life everywhere is based on intimate family life. Husband and wife co-operate in work, in the care and upbringing of children, in hospitality to relatives, which sometimes seems in western eyes to extend indefinitely over many generations. From father to son is handed down the family land, and often the family debts with it. Family festivals, births, marriages, deaths, are the landmarks in village life, and bring back to the village relatives who may have gone away to seek work.

In many parts of India the land is not adequate for the needs of the people. In areas where the soil is fertile and the rainfall abundant, the density of population may be as high as six hundred and forty-six per square mile as in Bengal, or even eight hundred and fourteen in Cochin on the south-west coast. Over the greater part of India the density is about two hundred per square mile, and this population, together with the uncertain rainfall, often means anxiety about the food supply. Central to all village life in all parts of the country is an overwhelming concern with ordinary livelihood. How to make the village lands produce enough for the families living on them? How to make the food go round and keep enough grain for sowing seed? How to make the cash needed for taxes and for purchases and for festivals? How to keep out of the hands of the moneylender? How to go on struggling with poverty that has no end, because it is always there? In some villages the poverty may be such that the people are crushed and degraded. In others, as in Talwara, it may be only an ever-present worry, gnawing at the hearts of hard-working men and women.

To all village people religion is part of daily life. The form of worship may vary as the villagers are Hindus, Moslems, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, or abori-

ginals in the jungles. With some the worship may be of one God. With others many gods and ancestors are present at all festivals, and intimately connected with the sowing and the reaping of crops. In whatever form they worship, village people are conscious of the unseen world about them and their daily tasks.

The strongest force in the village is that of public opinion. If a man wishes to keep his position and his dignity among his fellows he must conform to its demands. This has several results. Where public opinion is strong, in a village without factions, there will be few criminal and civil cases going to the courts, for men will not exceed the bounds of accepted behaviour. On the other hand, a well-organized village may be intensely conservative, nipping new ideas in the bud, and driving out the man who wants to try experiments.

To be a villager means that a man has a place in a community. It may be a very humble place, he may be only one among many equals, but the individual has a background and a setting, and therefore a sense of security. This may not mean material security. Poverty and sickness and debt may dog his footsteps. But in the world of men, as he sees it in his village, he has a status which is recognized, and in that security he faces all that karma brings to him.

## CHAPTER IV

### CITY LIFE

THE sun had risen over the city of Calcutta, bringing into prominence the tall buildings of the business section, the bulky outlines of the wharves, the tangled web of masts and mat sails on the river. It caught the rounded top of a temple on the edge of the water, and the sharp fronds of palm trees in a public garden at the end of the street. Amid the general grey-brown of the scene was here and there a vivid spot of colour: the bright yellow or red or magenta of *khaddar* shirts; the scarlet of policemen's turbans; the purple and yellow fringed curtains on a country cart; the crude blues and yellows and reds of a trayful of images balanced on a man's head.

Into the eyes of the sun, across the Hoogli bridge, moved a stream of people. Babus going to offices, boys to school, labourers for the docks, police regulating traffic, peasants from the countryside with baskets of vegetables on their heads, Anglo-Indians in western dress, an occasional European: all hurried along the narrow pavements at the side of the bridge, jostled every now and then by three or four men carrying a large crate on their heads and shuffling along in time to a rhythmical chant from their leader. Along the roadway in the middle of the bridge poured an endless stream of traffic. Motor buses, cars, lorries, light two-wheeled country carts with jingling bells, lumbering box-like *gharis* of the four-wheeler pattern, slow-moving

bullock carts, heavy wagons hauled by water-buffaloes : all pushed and squeezed and jammed to get into the city. Below, the river was almost as congested. Liners, tramp steamers, tugs with lines of barges behind them, ferry-boats piled with people and bundles, fishing-boats, dinghies with a mat covering : all moved to and fro to the accompaniment of whistles and hooting and shouting. Aloof from the noise and bustle were the bathers near the temple on the river bank. Oblivious of all around them they performed their devotions before going to their day's work.

What brought the crowd over the bridge into Calcutta, some from the main roads, some from the railway terminus ? For many it was the usual route to their daily work in the city. Others were evidently coming for the first time, looking about them with curious or frightened glances. Many were coming to join relatives in the city for the Durga festival and others to make a pilgrimage to the temple at Kalighat. Some therefore were at home in the city ; others were not.

#### ALIENS IN THE CITY

Among the crowd on the bridge was a group of aboriginal people from Bihar, sturdy in build and dark-skinned. They were Santals : two brothers and their families, and some younger men, all in charge of an older Santal who had come from Assam to recruit them for work in the tea-gardens there. Marvelling at the streets and trams, the shops and bazaars, they went on foot through the city to Calcutta's other railway terminus for the north and north-east.

As they dropped down to rest on the platform, one of the brothers asked the *sirdar*, " Where are the fields

for all these people? And when do they go to work in them?"

The sirdar laughed. "You are jungle folk. You think all men work in fields. But here in this city no man has a field. There is only the big *maidan* where the sahibs ride their horses."

"But how can they live without fields?" the man persisted.

The sirdar reflected a moment. "They buy and sell, as in markets. . . . They work in mills. . . . They carry loads. . . . They beg. Yes, often they are hungry."

"But when there is no more work, and none give them money, do they not then go away to some fields? How else can they have a store of rice for their family to eat?"

At that moment a train came in, and through the gate streamed a new crowd. "See," cried the sirdar, thankful to act showman, instead of answering riddles. "See those men; they are Moslems from Sylhet. They come to make crews on the big ships, each village group with its own sirdar. Those short wide men whose eyes turn up, who wear skirts and carry big bundles, they are Bhutia traders from Darjeeling. They bring turquoise and copper and yak wool from Tibet to sell in the bazaars here. Phew," he screwed up his nose as they passed, "how they smell of yak! Those men over there with the so thin women, they are very hungry. They are from East Bengal where the jute crop has failed. They have come here to work in the docks. The men will carry loads and the women will coal the ships."

Over Howrah bridge a hunter stalked his prey. The hunter was a burly Pathan from the N.W. Frontier, followed by several ruffianly assistants carrying *lathis*. He



was a moneylender, and his prey, as yet unconscious of a hunter on their trail, were some peasants from the northern part of the Madras Presidency coming to work in the jute mills. As they followed their sirdar over the bridge to the tram, walking in single file as they did on their field paths, they were thinking of the burnt-up lands where the rains had failed and where there was no longer enough to feed the people. While the tram jerked and screeched its way out to the mill area they were building castles in the air—castles of food enough and to spare, of money to send home to hungry relatives. At the gates of the jute mill the sirdar handed them over, their names were entered in a register, they put thumb marks against their names, and the men were sent to the spinning-shed, the women to the sorting-rooms. They became factory hands.

After the day's work, they were established in their new home. The two men had eaten, and were smoking *bidis*, squatting on their haunches in the doorway. A damp chill was rising from the ground, making them shiver in their cotton garments. Looking across the rutted track full of pools of water and refuse at other huts such as theirs, with matting walls, broken thatch, a low doorway, and no windows, one of them said: "Yes, brother, this house is dirty. It smells bad. The road smells bad. Inside it is dark. But it is better than the places the foreman showed us. Those were shameful houses; many in one, an open veranda, no cover to the windows. All men passing could see in. How could our wives have lived there?"

Inside the hut the two wives were finishing the inadequate remains of the meal they had cooked for their husbands. Their dream of food enough and to spare had been shattered. They could not make them-

selves understood in the bazaar, for they spoke only Telugu and the shopkeepers Bengali and Hindustani. Never had they paid such a price for grain; the vegetables seemed even more exorbitant; and they could only get mustard oil with which to cook, for no one seemed to sell the cocoanut oil to which they were accustomed. It was indeed a strange country. They blew on the little heap of charcoal between three stones and tried to forget the damp outside and the gnawing hunger within. Their eyebrows and hair were coated with jute fluff, and they continually cleared their throats to rid them of the irritating dust they had breathed all day in the jute sorting-room.

"Hi, you! Do not escape. I have a man behind. Come out, dog, and pay me." The two Madrassis craned their necks to see what was happening down the lane. The big Pathan moneylender was in front of a hut, his assistants standing by, pounding the ground with their lathis. One of them dived into the hut and came out holding a man by the scruff of his neck. "Who lent you money to pay the rent? Who lent you money to go home and bury your father? Now, pay. Pay that interest or I will beat you." The Pathan shouted, his assistant shook the victim, the victim put his hands together in supplication and crouched on the ground. The Pathan gave a nod to the assistant, who began to rain blows on the victim's back. Whimpering, he crawled back into the hut and returned with a small handful of coins. The Pathan took them, spat on the ground and stalked off. A Telugu onlooker from a neighbouring hut said, "Every night that jackal is with us. Do we save a little? He knows it and gets it from us. And how can we live without borrowing? A thousand curses on him and his ways."

The Madrassis shuddered and drew into their hut. What if such a fate was in store for them? This was indeed an inauspicious beginning for their change over from the field to the factory.

#### AT HOME IN THE CITY

"Salaam, babu-ji." The red-coated messenger handed the chief clerk a long envelope, and withdrew silently on bare feet. Bhupendralal Mitra looked at the contents, took some cardamon seeds from the pocket of his long shirt, chewed them meditatively and looked out of the window. The hot afternoon was drawing to a close. In the public gardens at the end of Clive Street a number of people were sitting by the tank, waiting for the cool of the evening.

"Babu-ji," said a young clerk hesitatingly. "Gopal babu sent me to ask if the recruiting returns had come in yet from No. 3 mill."

Bhupendralal Mitra came to earth suddenly. "Here," he said, handing over the envelope. "Tell Gopal babu there were only four Madrassis, two men and two women to-day. The jobber says they are a very poor lot, half starved, and they'll soon get fever, and be no good."

A little later Bhupendralal Mitra and his relatives who worked in the same firm were in the tram going home. They all wore the conventional dress of the Bengali babu—white dhoti, long shirt over the dhoti, European socks, garters, and shoes—and carried umbrellas. Bhupendralal Mitra had a good post in the big firm which controlled several jute mills. His value in the eyes of the firm was such that when he produced two nephews, then two brothers-in-law, then two of their nephews, he was able to get them all posts in his office.

In virtue of his position there as chief clerk he controlled them all in their work as he did in their domestic life as head of the family.

When the tram was running along Chowringhee, with European shops on one hand and the open park-like maidan reaching to the river on the other, he announced : " I am going now to Kalighat, and Gopal goes with me. We have business in the lane of the image-makers. You go to my house and wait till I come."

Both brothers-in-law were anxious to get home to their fathers' houses where preparations for the Durga *pūja* would be in full swing. But they were accustomed to defer to their brother-in-law, who had asserted his authority over them ever since they married his two younger sisters, and they had several times discovered that his authority was much more potent than that of their own fathers.

In the lane leading to the famous shrine at Kalighat, crowds were coming and going from the temples, and the beggars lining the roadside, exposing their maimed limbs and running sores to catch the pitying and the pious eye, were reaping a golden harvest. While his uncle transacted his business in the street of the image-makers, Gopal wandered into the great courtyard of the temple. A gong was sounding and a mob waiting to surge through a narrow passage in order to get a momentary glimpse of Kali, one of Siva's consorts, when the doors of her temple were opened. Under a tree an ascetic was lying on a bed of spikes, his hair matted, his body smeared with ash. An old woman was lingering round the wooden post where the goats were killed, and rubbing on her forehead the dried blood from the morning's sacrifice. Gopal thought of his father, who had been influenced by the Brahmo Samaj, a reforming movement,

and had often shown signs of distress at some of the cruder forms of Hinduism manifested round Kali's shrine. His uncle was very orthodox, exceptionally so for one in his position as head clerk, observing all the required ceremonials, and not allowing any modernist questioning in his presence. The younger members of the family, like Gopal, who were inwardly critical about the spiritual value of slaughtering goats and worshipping a decorated clay image and bathing in the muddy waters of the Hoogly, had to keep their scepticism to themselves.

In the street of the image-makers, where Gopal rejoined his uncle, there were all the signs of an eleventh-hour hustle. Everyone who could afford it wanted a big image of Durga, the Great Mother, to set up and worship in the courtyard of his house, and every father wanted to buy little images of Durga for the children in the household. The stalls of images spread out half-way across the street, gay with colour. The image-makers on their verandas were busy plastering the straw figures with clay, and painting those that were dry in vivid blue and yellow and green.

When the men reached home they were carrying several small images and painted toys, for to the Bengalis the Durga puja is like a Christmas festival, a time of family reunion and giving of presents. In the courtyard several children were looking wonderingly up at the big image of Durga. "Already the spirit of the goddess is there. The priests have put it in the covered clay pot. In three days will be the time when the goddess will be dressed like a bride in silks and jewels, kids will be sacrificed, and the spirit will come into the image from the earthen pot." So prattled the children to Gopal, before he and his uncle climbed the steep dark stairs up to the roof. Pungent smells of curries being

cooked were wafted up from the women's quarters, where the women of the household were preparing the evening meal. Seated cross-legged on charpoys the men chewed pān, betel nut touched with lime and folded in a pān leaf, while they looked out across the roofs and the smoky air tinged with sunset colours.

Bhupendralal spat the red pān juice into a brass vessel, and addressed the others. "You know that it is of the marriage of my son Amyio that I wish to speak. We are proud of being Mukhya Kulins, the original and most important group of our Kayasth caste of writers. Our women observe purdah and do not behave as do the women of some other families, and go freely in the streets. I have already married my eldest daughter to a Mukya and if I marry my eldest son also to a Mukya I shall be called 'Navarangi,' and no title can be more worthy of respect."

Murmurs of assent and admiration came from the other men. "I have seen our family priest," went on Bhupendralal. "And he has found a suitable bride; the horoscopes have agreed, and the dowry is settled. He has indeed already been to this house and received his commission on the dowry. Now it remains to fix an auspicious day for the final ceremonies, for I do not intend to omit any of the usual customs of our caste in this marriage." Half to himself he went on: "At the ceremony the girl will be transferred from her family to ours by the Brahmins reciting the names of her father and grandfather, and of my son's father and grandfather. Their clothes will be knotted together, they will walk seven times round the sacred fire, my son will put the red mark on her forehead, and the Brahmins will throw rice over them that the union may be fertile. So it has always been done by us."

After a suitable pause the eldest nephew said : " We are glad indeed that you have arranged all things so well. Our family will be held in much esteem if everything is so done according to custom."

In another Bengali home at the other end of the city, a family was also discussing the marriage of a son. Like the Mitra family, the Deys lived in a tall house built round a courtyard, intended to house the joint family, that is the father and mother, their sons, their sons' wives and their children, as well as any relatives on the father's side who needed a home.

Uma, the eldest daughter, had returned from school in the school bus. Carrying her books she had walked along the street to the entrance of the house. In the veranda looking on to the inner courtyard she found the family conclave. Her father, Ram Mohan Dey, a lecturer in the university, was there ; her eldest brother, Satish ; her father's brother who was a lawyer, with his two sons ; her mother and a sister of her father who was visiting them. This sister belonged to the Brahmo Samaj, the reformed sect which broke away from Hinduism and whose founder was influenced by Christian teaching. She had never married, and was head mistress of a big girls' school in Eastern Bengal.

" Come, Uma," said her father affectionately. " We want you to tell us what they teach at your school about the old and new ways of living. Do they tell you to leave all the old ways behind ? Your uncle would like to know what a Christian school teaches about such things."

Uma sat down on a low cane stool and clasped her knees. " I hardly know how to tell you," she said, rather shyly ; but when urged by her father she went on : " I have often wondered why you sent me to our school of the lotus flower. Perhaps it was because

there, while we learn new things, we do not forget the old. We must learn new things like mathematics and science. But I am glad that we also learn Indian history and Bengali music, and that we study and use old Indian designs in our art classes. We play western games, net-ball and badminton and tennis, and we do eurythmics and we act plays. We learn, too, useful things like how to take care of a house and children, and how to prepare food for sick people. And we learn to see the good in other people's ways. For we have girls from Assam and Bihar and the United Provinces and Orissa. We have Christian, Hindu and Moslem girls all together, and we have to respect each other's ways if we are to get on together. Then, too, we have often said in my class that we want to do something useful when we leave school. Many of the girls will go and teach, some of the Christians even to village schools. To-morrow our class will go for the day to a village where there is no school, to see how village people live."

"You see," said Ram Mohan turning to his brother, "why I sent Uma to that Christian school? They do not reject everything that is old. They do not seek to westernize the girls and to fill their minds with ideas belonging to wealthy city life. I believe that the Principal has great wisdom in blending the old and the new for her girls. I believe, too, that without some spiritual insight, some understanding of the place of religion in life, which that Christian school gives, one cannot guide either oneself or others in these days of change. Now, Uma, Satish here is saying that when he is married next spring, he does not want to bring his wife home to this house. He wants to take a flat and set up a home of his own. He says that several of his friends at the university do that. What do you think?"



Uma was somewhat taken aback at being asked suddenly for her opinion on so vital a matter. "I do not know that I can tell you," she said. "It is true that I have talked about this with my school friends." She looked at her mother to see how she would take it. "If you do not mind, I think that when I am married I shall want to go with my husband to a home of our own, and not to his father's house. I would like freedom to bring up my children in the way I should choose."

At that moment a car stopped at the door and several of Satish's friends came in. The women got up and slipped quietly away, for though they did not observe purdah they did not yet mix freely with the men visitors to the house unless they were relatives. In the women's rooms at the back of the house they found Uma's grandmother making *sandesh*, a favourite Bengali sweet. Continuing the conversation downstairs, Uma's mother said: "It is very strange that you and Satish should have such different ideas from ours. Now your father's mother here cannot read or write. Yet she knows much of the sacred books of the Hindus by heart, for twice a week the Brahmin priest comes to read to her. And she knows much more about cooking and household duties than I do. For my father came under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj and cared much for the education of women, as your father has done. I was taught English and Bengali, both to read and to write, and I learned both the piano and the esraj.<sup>1</sup> While you, Uma, not only go to school, but you will go to the university also before you are married. And here is Satish proposing not to live with us any more after he is married."

"What is that? What is that?" broke in the old

<sup>1</sup> a kind of violin.

grandmother. "The son of my son will not live in his father's house? How then shall his son learn the ways of a householder? How shall the daughter-in-law be taught by his father's mother? It is a terrible thing that you do when you break this joint family. For on it are all the Hindu virtues based, and in it Hindu children learn all that is most important for them in life." She went on to quote verses from the Hindu scriptures to maintain her argument, while the younger women listened in respectful silence. Afterwards Uma's aunt said: "We think, mother, that yours is great wisdom. But we think, too, that changes must come, and that we cannot prevent these changes. We women to-day are not content with old ways. It is true that many husbands and fathers in this city still keep their women in strict purdah. But look how many let them be educated like Uma here. I do not believe that her freedom makes Uma love her home and her parents any less. Indeed, I believe that her education and her new ideas will help her to bring up her children wisely to love and serve their motherland."

As Uma walked away along the veranda to study her lessons for the next day she found Satish coming round the corner, looking troubled.

"Sister, you do agree with me? Tell me. For this is a hard time when the young and the old do not agree."

"I do agree, brother," said Uma earnestly. "We who are young must go along new ways, though we may hurt our fathers and mothers. But our father will not oppose us. He believes that the future of our motherland is for us to make. He trusts us not to misuse our freedom."

Satish thought for a moment: "Listen—has not Rabi-babu, our great poet, said that? He said it for you and

me, sister, and for our children." And he quoted the well-known lines from Rabindranath Tagore, to whom he had referred by the title of affection given to him by the Bengali people :

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held  
high ;  
Where knowledge is free ;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
by narrow domestic walls,  
Where words come out from the depth of truth. . . .  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widen-  
ing thought and action :  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country  
awake.<sup>1</sup>

#### CITIES PAST AND PRESENT

In early days in India, as in Europe, cities were built mainly for purposes of defence or as royal courts, often combining both functions. The pilgrim centres also were often the nucleus of cities. Other towns grew up as centres of commerce, as market towns, or as centres of learning. In the India of to-day there are many small market towns. There are pilgrim centres such as Madura and Benares and Puri. There are places famous for their schools and colleges, such as Aligarh and Poona. The cities of former royal courts are now some of them administrative centres, such as Lucknow for the United Provinces, or Delhi for all India. A new factor in the building of cities has been the coming of modern industry to India. Big seaports, important railway centres, modern factories and mines, bring together great numbers of people, and create some of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *Gitanjali*, by kind permission of the author and of the publishers, Macmillan & Co., Ltd.

the bad conditions in city life which we associate with slums and over-crowding in Europe.

It is significant that in India the largest towns are chiefly in the north. North of a line from Poona to Calcutta lie thirteen out of sixteen of the cities with over two hundred thousand inhabitants. Of these big cities, some are administrative centres, some industrial; some, like Calcutta and Bombay, are both, and are also seats of famous universities. The labouring population of a city like Calcutta is very largely alien to the city, drawn in from the surrounding areas, and this does not necessarily mean the country area immediately round the city. In Calcutta thirty-two per cent of the population comes from outside Bengal, and in the jute mill area adjoining Calcutta the proportion is eighty-six per cent.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these workers retain some connection with their villages and return to them periodically, keeping no foothold in the city. In the big cities, however, and to a much greater extent in the smaller towns, there is a stable city population with its real home and interests in the city. To them city life is as much their normal setting as village life is for the peasant. Their life is built up in the family and the caste or religious group to which they belong. But for the alien in the city who has left most of his relatives in a distant village there exists no community, and he and his family find themselves isolated and friendless among the crowds. To the villager who is forced into the city for work, this is the greatest change he has to face.

<sup>1</sup> Census, Bengal, 1931.

## CHAPTER V

### INDIA'S PAST

#### SONS OF CHIEFS

SIVAJI sat cross-legged in a corner of the veranda, looking across the dusty quadrangle to the purple bougainvillæa on the Principal's house. On his knee lay a time-chart<sup>1</sup> on which he was entering the chief events of Indian history, and beside him was a heap of books.

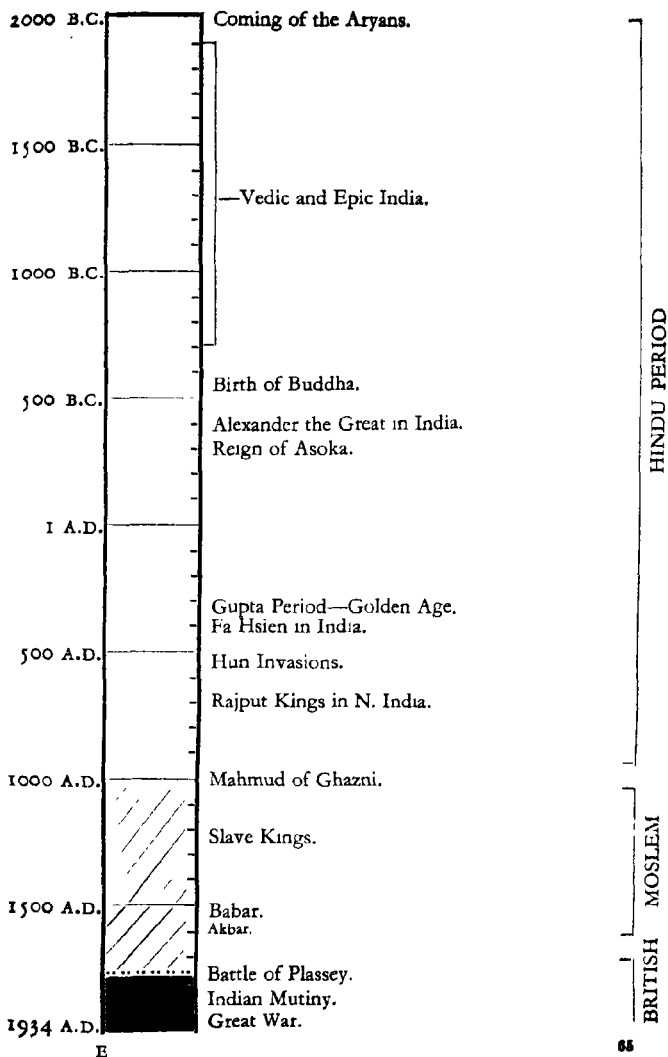
"Mr Smith made us begin this time-chart in 2000 B.C.," he was thinking. "He said the Aryans came into India about then. I wish I knew more Sanskrit, so that I could read the Vedas and the Upanishads, because they tell of the life of those very early Aryan days." Sivaji clasped his knees, thinking of the long discussions between the pundits at his father's court about the meaning of this or that text in the Vedas.

His friend, Abdul Khan, came round the corner of the house. "Ho! Sivaji. Why do you work so hard? Is it still history that you are studying? What is the good of all those early tales? They are only legends, anyway."

"For us Hindus," said Sivaji earnestly, "they are not 'only legends.' When I was a little boy I used to sit in the great court with the other boys of the household and hear wandering story-tellers repeat the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Those epics are our past,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 65.

# TIME CHART OF INDIAN HISTORY



Abdul Khan. And I don't care whether they are historically accurate or not. They are the early stories of our land."

"Well, I don't think the past is much use to us now," said Abdul Khan. "Our fathers sent us to this school to make us into good practical rulers. Engineering and modern science are what we need to study—not legends."

"We cannot understand our people though," insisted Sivaji, "unless we know their past. And to the common people legendary history that is told them in epics is just as important as written history."

Abdul Khan picked up the time-chart. "Now some of this *is* history. This kingdom of Magadha, for instance, in the Ganges Valley about 600 B.C. Mr Smith said that from coins and inscriptions we could get a fairly accurate account of Indian history as far back as that. Rather like a detective's job of tracing clues. But the Greeks were the ones to give us the first written records. I should like to know more of what Alexander the Great and his men thought of India in 326 B.C. I like fighting men, and those Greek soldiers must have been a splendid force."

"Yes, you like wars and invasions and you think history is tame without them," said Sivaji. "But I like what goes on in spite of the wars—the life of the common people, and all the literature and religion and art. You remember how after Alexander the Great's death, his successor, Seleucus, sent an ambassador to the court of the Emperor Chandragupta Maurya."

"That was Megasthenes," broke in Abdul Khan, "the man who gave us the first written account of life in India. It was he who wrote about the war office of the Emperor, and how well it was organized, but he said too how the warrior caste was less important than

the priests. You Hindus have always given your priests so much power."

"It was Chandragupta's Brahmin minister, Kutilya," put in Sivaji, "who is supposed to have written the *Arthasāstra*—the science of practical government. You like organization, Abdul Khan. You had better study what he says about the municipal government of the capital, which was very well organized. More than two thousand years ago in that ancient kingdom we had a great civilization. And yet do you remember Mr Smith saying that many British people hardly knew that there was any Indian history before Clive and the Battle of Plassey?"

"Huh—our people had a war office and a census department before Julius Cæsar ever discovered them. Come on, let's play tennis."

### HINDU RULE IN INDIA

Just as British history did not begin with the coming of the Romans, so Indian history did not begin with the coming of the Aryans. When those tall fair people came in tribal waves over the north-west passes from some home in Central Asia, they found India already inhabited by other races. In the north and centre of India were short dark-skinned people, to whom the Aryans gave insulting names, such as "monkey people," or "the noseless ones," referring to their broad flat noses. Some of these aborigines fled before the invaders into the forests and hills of Central India, where they can be found to this day, speaking their own languages. Others were forced by the aristocratic Aryans to do all the menial work for them in their settlements.



A glance at the relief map <sup>1</sup> will show how India is divided into three main areas : the river valleys in the north from the Punjab to Bengal ; the tableland of Central India ; and the coastal plains of the south.

This division of the land has had a great influence on the course of Indian history. It has been one of the chief reasons why in India there have been many small kingdoms and few great empires. The northern river valleys gave rise from time to time to great empires. The lands of the far south have been separate kingdoms, never under the northern rulers. The central highlands have been sometimes under the nominal authority of the northern rulers, but the dense forests and the wild hills kept civilization from spreading into that area, and were an effective barrier between north and south.

The Aryans made their chief settlements in the northern river valleys. A few of them penetrated by way of the narrow plains on the east and west coasts into the south, where they settled as overlords over the Dravidian races who themselves had probably come at a much earlier date from some home outside India.

When the curtain rises on the historical period the life of the people was set in certain forms, so definite that foreign observers like Megasthenes could describe them clearly. Wherever the Aryans had settled the caste system was found. The highest caste, the Brahmins, were the scholars and priests, and as the chief men of learning were the king's ministers and advisers. Below them came the warriors, below them the trading and agricultural castes, and the lowest castes and outcastes were the artisans and village menials, who were often the conquered aboriginal tribes.

The religion of the people was Hinduism, in which

<sup>1</sup> See p. 15.

there was a mingling of the worship of nature gods, of the three chief Hindu gods, Brahma, Siva and Vishnu, and of the gods of the aboriginals. Supreme in religious life were the Brahmin priests, who alone knew the sacred books and alone could perform the chief sacrifices to the gods. As a protest against the formalism and the priestly dominance of the Brahmins, two other religions had arisen in North India in the fifth century B.C., Buddhism and Jainism, both emphasizing the sacred virtues of tolerance and kindness to all living creatures. But the power of the Brahmins was such that Hinduism eventually triumphed over these two later faiths.

The civilization of the Hindus had reached a high level. Philosophy, literature and art were held in great esteem, patronised by the royal courts, and preserved by the Brahmins during the periods of incessant warfare.

These features of Indian life have persisted through all her history. The supremacy of the Brahmins, the rigid caste system, the Hindu religion, the high value set on learning and art: while empires and kingdoms rose and fell, these characteristics remained.

Among the great figures of Indian history the Emperor Asoka stands out in the Hindu period, as the Emperor Akbar does in the Moslem period. Asoka was the grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, to whose court came the Greek ambassador, Megasthenes. Following the tradition of his fathers he sent armies to conquer outlying parts of India and add them to his empire. But when his armies returned from devastating Orissa, Asoka reflected on the glories of victory and found them hollow and empty. "His Majesty feels remorse," he recorded, "on account of the conquest, because during the subjugation of a country,

slaughter, death and the taking away captive of the people necessarily occur." What aim should he set himself as a ruler, if not that of military conquest? In the teaching of Gautama Buddha he found the guidance he was seeking, and he decided that the laws of Buddha should be the laws of his land. The laws of duty, of piety, of tolerance, of kindliness to all living things: these he determined to impress on his subjects. On rocks and pillars in different parts of the country he inscribed his Edicts, setting forth the principles on which his empire was to be governed, in order that "security, self-control, peace of mind, and joyousness" should be the lot of all his people. To himself he said, as we can read in Rock Edict VI: "Work I must for the public benefit, and the root of the matter is exertion and dispatch of business. . . . The public weal is a difficult thing to attain save by the utmost toil. . . . In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness: in their welfare his welfare."

Asoka, as befitted a great Indian ruler, encouraged art and learning in his lands, and sent emissaries to the rulers in South India and in more distant lands. He dispatched missionaries to Ceylon, to Tibet, and to China, to preach the law of Buddha. Out of these missions came many later contacts with China through pilgrims to India.

The attempt to make Buddhism the official religion of India did not survive Asoka's death. Gradually under the influence of the Brahmins the more formal Hindu religion prevailed, though Buddhist monasteries for many years remained centres of religious teaching. Yet Buddha had left a permanent impression on Indian life. The ideas of tolerance and piety and kindliness, stressed in Buddhist teaching, became part of the Hindu

attitude to life, and had a deep influence on Hindu religious and philosophical thought.

A Chinese pilgrim, Fa Hsien, who came to India in A.D. 399 to visit the holy places of the Buddhist faith, has given us in the records of his visit a vivid picture of the land and life of India at that time. It was during the reign of the Emperor Chandragupta II, of the Gupta dynasty (A.D. 300-600), which with the Maurya dynasty (about 326-185 B.C.) forms the two greatest epochs in the Hindu period. This Emperor, who took the title of Vikramaditya, "Sun of Power," ruled over a great part of North India. At his court at Pataliputra<sup>1</sup> learning and art so flourished under royal patronage that this period has been called the Golden Age of mediæval India. At the court the great poet, Kalidasa, one of the "nine gems of culture," wrote plays and epic poems, and the others sang and painted the Emperor's praises, while mathematicians and astronomers wrestled with scientific problems. Fa Hsien in his journals wrote of the life of the common people, of the prosperous state of the country, the mild administration of justice, the good government which enabled strangers to travel in safety.

In the middle of the fifth century A.D. the Huns descended upon India, as they did upon Persia and Eastern Europe. In a series of invasions they laid waste the land, and swept away governments, culture, and all ordered life. From the invasions of the Huns to the invasions of the Moslems there was no great empire in North India.

These years saw the rise of the Rajput clans, said by some scholars to be the descendants of White Huns who settled in western India. For nearly three hundred

<sup>1</sup> Near Patna.

years Rajput rulers of many small kingdoms ruled over most of North India, fighting among themselves and owning no overlord.

We have seen how the kingdoms of South India, cut off geographically, never formed part of the northern empire. Until the Moslem invasions their history is quite separate from that of the north, though the characteristics which we have noticed of the Hindu period are true also in South India. There was constant warfare between the kingdoms, but under strong rulers literature and art flourished at the royal courts. The great temples at Conjeeveram and Madura were built during this period, and at Madura an academy of learning produced many famous scholars. Under the caste system the Brahmins were supreme both in social and religious life, and became even more powerful as a ruling caste in South India than in the North.

#### MOSLEM RULE IN INDIA

About the year A.D. 1000 the first of the Moslem invaders, under Mahmud of Ghazni, swept into India through the north-west passes. Like the Aryans they were lured by the rich river valleys, but unlike the Aryans they came at first only to raid and not to settle. Their furious onslaughts on the peaceful Hindu populations were inspired chiefly by the "holy war" against the infidel, but also by a passion to plunder. To nomads with few possessions like the Moslem hordes the wealth of India seemed fabulous. The Indian peasants, traders, priests, rulers, who were idolaters to the Moslems, had to choose between forced conversion to Islam and being robbed of all their riches. Gradually, however, the Moslem invaders ceased to return to the hills with their plunder in the hot summers, and began to settle

in Afghanistan, the Punjab, and Sind, which are still the areas with the most numerous Moslem population. By 1175 the Moslem rulers desired to include in their kingdoms the richer lands of the Ganges Valley. For nearly three hundred and fifty years one ruler after another advanced on Delhi, and as Sultans of Delhi conquered the surrounding territories. In the plains around Delhi to-day can be seen the ruins of cities which they built and fortified. But there was no permanence and no consolidation under these earlier Moslem rulers. State conspiracies and new invasions overthrew one dynasty after another. Insecurity and devastation were the lot of the people and the land until the days of the Mogul Empire.

In 1526 there descended from the hills of the north-west one of the most picturesque figures in Indian history. Babar, the first of the great Mogul emperors, was of the line of the dreaded Tartar rulers of Central Asia, Timurlane and Ghengiz Khan. He was no mere raider, but as one of his biographers said of him, "to the daring and restlessness of the nomad Tartar he joined the culture and urbanity of the Persian." Persia under the Moslems had become famous for its learning and its art, and had a great influence upon the development of Indian culture under the Mogul emperors.

From Babar's own hand come his Memoirs. In them he tells us how his heart was always in the hills of Kabul, where he had once laid out gardens and studied flowers and birds. He set himself the task of conquering Delhi, but during the military manœuvres in those sun-baked plains his mind often fled to the delights of the hills. In his Memoirs he breaks off suddenly in the midst of an account of military tactics to describe the gardens at Samarkand and the pasturage for horses in

the meadows. Writing to one of his old generals he says : " How is it possible that the delights of Kabul should ever be erased from the heart ? . . . Be sure when you are laying out the orchards to make symmetrical grass plots bordered with sweet-smelling flowers."

Babar's grandson, Akbar, who came to the throne in 1556, established the Mogul empire on a firm footing. A contemporary of Queen Elizabeth and of Philip of Spain, Akbar was acknowledged as one of the world's greatest rulers of his day, and received embassies from many foreign courts. He set himself three chief aims, all of which he lived to see carried out. The first was the consolidation of his empire. When he came to the throne he ruled over a relatively small area in the Punjab and Ganges Valley. At the end of his fifty years' reign the empire included all India north of the Godavery river, from Baluchistan in the west to Bengal in the east.

His second aim was to restore prosperity to the people after the centuries of war and devastation. In the *Ain-i-Akbari* (the Acts of Akbar), written by one of his chief advisers, are recorded his reforms in the administration of justice and in the collection of revenue. His revenue system, based on the holding of land, has been followed to a large extent ever since ; and measurements of land, kind of land, and crops grown on it are still recorded in the tax assessments or " Settlements " largely by his methods.

His third aim, that of uniting Hindus and Moslems in the service of the land, was the most important. For five hundred years the Moslems had achieved power by the sword as overlords and warrior chiefs. They had employed Hindu mercenaries and clerks as need

arose, but in general they showed towards Hindus, as we have seen, a ruthless policy of either forced conversion to Islam, or plunder and often extermination. Akbar saw that numerically the Hindus were too strong for him. He saw also that the learning of the Brahmins would be a valuable asset to his empire. He therefore forbade any persecution of the Hindus by Moslems, and proclaimed freedom of conscience and worship for all. He appointed Brahmin ministers to advise him in the affairs of state. To his city of Fatepur Sikri he summoned Brahmins, Moslems, Jains, and Jesuits, and in the Hall of Disputation he listened to their expositions of their faiths.

In person Akbar was much beloved by the people. Like Asoka he was concerned with every side of their welfare, and was accessible to them at all hours in his Hall of Audience. He worked ceaselessly, sleeping only three hours in the twenty-four, and found time in the midst of governing his empire to be interested in new inventions such as cannons and gunpowder.

Under his strong government, and under the patronage of the court, literature and art began to flower again. The Mogul period is not only famous for the exploits of the Mogul emperors in the field of military victory and civil administration. Its most lasting glory is its architecture, its painting, and its literature. The famous buildings at Delhi and Agra, and the Mogul school of painting received their impetus from the reign of Akbar, though it was his grandson, Shah Jehan, who built the Taj Mahal, the most perfect of them all. Of his own achievements, such as his city of Fatepur Sikri, his chroniclers could say: "His Majesty plans splendid edifices, and clothes the work of his mind and heart in the garment of stone and clay."



## THE EUROPEANS IN INDIA

In one or two places in India to-day are to be found small districts which do not belong either to the British or to the Indian States. The Portuguese possession of Goa on the west coast, the French possessions at Chander-nagore in Bengal and Pondicherry near Madras, remind us of the settlements of European powers in India prior to the British. These settlements, like the early British settlements at Surat and Madras and Calcutta, were for purposes of trade, to develop the commercial connections between India and Europe which had continued for several centuries.

The rivalry of the British and French in South India and Bengal, and their gradual interference in Indian political life, are too well known to need mention here. The early years of British settlement in India can be studied in any English history book.

## BRITISH RULE IN INDIA

When the East India Company took up the task of governing in India after the battle of Plassey in 1757, India was plunged into the anarchy which followed the break-up of the Mogul empire. Between that time and to-day, when the outstanding political question is the position of India within the British empire, lie one hundred and seventy-seven years of British rule. If we would understand what lies behind the demand of India to-day for national independence, we must endeavour to trace in this last period of Indian history the process whereby India has emerged from the anarchy of 1757 to the vigorous nationalism of 1934.

We cannot here give any survey of the events of these years, and they are to be found in most English

history books. We can, however, see that the history falls into two main periods, leading up to the present-day relations between Great Britain and India. The first period was from 1757-1857, from Clive's victory at Plassey to the Mutiny. It is possible to see in some of the pronouncements of that period that the British aim was a self-governing India, and that Britain did not intend always to govern India from Westminster. The shock of the Mutiny, which was unexpected both in India and in England, had a profound effect on the attitude of many British people. The friendly co-operation of British and Indian in India, which had been evident in the pre-Mutiny days, gave place to a feeling of distrust on the part of the British and fear of another armed outbreak.

Nevertheless the second period from 1857-1917 began with a proclamation by Queen Victoria, setting out certain lines of policy to be followed in the Government of India :

Whereas for divers weighty reasons we have resolved . . . to take upon ourselves the government of the territories in India, heretofore administered in trust for us by the Honourable East India Company. . . .

We hereby announce to the native princes of India that all treaties and engagements made with them by the East India Company are by us accepted. . . .

That none be in any wise favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faiths or observances.

It is our wish that our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to office in our service. . . .

We will that in framing and administering the law, due regard be paid to the ancient rights, usages, and customs of India. . . .

It is our earnest desire to stimulate the peaceful history of India, to promote works of public utility and improvement, and to administer the government for the benefit of all our subjects resident therein. In their prosperity will be our strength, in their contentment our security, and in their gratitude our best reward.

In these pronouncements we can see the following principles: that of recognizing the separate and independent existence of the Indian States; of official tolerance towards all religions; of regard for Indian custom in the framing of laws; and of admitting Indians into the service of the government. There was, however, no declaration of the ultimate goal for India. It was not until the end of the second period that such a declaration was made. In August 1917 the Secretary of State for India (Mr Montagu) announced in the House of Commons that British policy was "not only the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, but also the granting of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India." Indians regarded this as a momentous statement. Conscious that they had been for one hundred and sixty years a subject race in the eyes of the world, it seemed as though at last their past was being given back to them, and that the period of British rule was only an interlude in the history of a proud race.

The period of British rule, however, was the time during which India emerged as a modern nation to take her place among the nations of the world. We can trace from 1757 to 1917 progressive stages by which modern India was built up, always bearing in mind that modern India is founded on her past.

The first stage towards nationhood was the pacifica-

tion of India, brought about, paradoxically, by a series of wars. By the middle of the nineteenth century internal wars in India had ceased and the territories of British India were as they are to-day, with the exception of Burma. The Indian States, numbering nearly six hundred and including a quarter of the population and a third of the territory of India, were bound to the British Crown by a series of special treaties, and were not under the Government of India.

The pacification of India was a necessary step towards unification. It has often been said that India has no unity, and this has been used as an argument against the granting of self-government. The unification of a country formerly split up into a number of small units must follow certain lines : the territories must be made one land ; the administrations must be made one government ; the peoples must be made one nation. This was the chief aim of Akbar, which he only partially achieved. During the period of British rule all the territories in British India were united under one government ; a system of communications was built up by railways, road and telegraph, which linked together all parts of the land ; a lingua franca, English, was introduced for common use among the two hundred languages of India. What no external power could do, however, was to make one nation of all the peoples of India. That final link in the unification of India is being forged to-day by the Indian people themselves.

The third stage was the introduction of a modern educational system into India. The opening of high schools and universities had several important political results. Indians became acquainted with the learning of the West, especially with modern science and political theory. Many of them travelled to Europe for further

study and saw democratic governments at work. Most significant of all, modern education put the educated Indian in possession of all that had hitherto made the European seem superior: it established the principle of equality of opportunity.

In addition to education, other public services were instituted which contributed to the building up of the Indian nation. Here should be included public health services, railways, posts and telegraphs, irrigation, care of forests, and the elaborate provision of relief in times of famine known as the Famine Code.

The last stage was the association of Indians in the government of the country. From the days of the East India Company Indians had been trained and employed as clerks and minor officials, and the Queen's proclamation of 1857 had emphasized the principle of admitting Indians to office in the government. But the distrust among the British roused by the Mutiny was at the root of the long-continued opposition to handing over to educated Indians an increasing responsibility for government. Only by slow degrees were Indians admitted into the higher ranks of the administrative services, and into the Legislative Councils. By the outbreak of the Great War some progress had been made, and there was a beginning of representative institutions in India. By that time, however, the Nationalist movement had gathered strength, and in the next chapter we shall see how these developments produced the present political situation.

#### LEGACIES FROM THE PAST

Mr Smith came across the compound and saw Sivaji and Abdul Khan arguing at the end of the veranda.





#### A SOUTH INDIAN VILLAGE

The houses of the village are constructed of mud and thatched with palm leaves. The thatched roofs are made of palm leaves and are very steep.

The village is situated in a valley, and the vegetation is very dense.

"Well, what did you think of the Rai Bahadur's lecture?" he asked.

"I was just saying, Sir," said Sivaji, "that he said there were so many clashes in India due to her history, between Aryan and aboriginal, between Hindu and Moslem, between Indian and British, but he didn't say what each had left to India, and after all there were times of building up as well as times of clash."

"Well, what do you think the Hindu legacy was, Sivaji?"

"The caste system, Sir, with all its good and bad sides. The ideas of piety and tolerance which came originally from Buddhism but which became part of Hinduism. The belief in the importance of learning and art which the Brahmins preserved."

"Those sound very religious and not very practical," said Abdul Khan. "We Moslems brought a fighting tradition, though some of your Sikhs and Marathas had it too. And good organization, like Akbar's land revenue system. And the worship of one God, which made a unity among the Moslems."

"And what do you think the British legacy is?" asked Mr Smith.

"Modern education and western science," said Abdul Khan at once. "Railways, telegraphs, hydro-electric works, cotton mills—all the modern things that give India a chance to grow great by using her own resources."

"My father says," said Sivaji, thoughtfully, "that the two greatest things brought by the English are the English language and Christianity. He is a Hindu, but he thinks that the Christian religion has inspired nearly all the reforming movements in India, and especially the education of girls. He asked some Christian



missionaries to come and start a girls' school in our capital. He doesn't believe that you can have education without religion. He says too that Christianity is at last persuading us Hindus to care for the outcastes and depressed classes, and that no country can be great which does not care for all the people."

"That was what the Rai Bahadur said, wasn't it, Sir?" said Abdul Khan. "He told us that as future rulers of our States we had to realize that the greatest task before India to-day was the government of the masses, and that we had to remember Asoka's saying: in the welfare of the subjects lies the welfare of the rulers."

## CHAPTER VI

### RULERS AND RULED

“So this is the Santal country,” said Mohammed Ali to himself. Before him rose a steep hill, the lower slopes terraced to form rice fields, the summit covered with trees, and in between a village of mud huts roofed with thatch. All around lay similar hills and villages and terraced fields, the home of the Santals. Among the aboriginal tribes of Bihar and Orissa they were famous for their skill in clearing and terracing rough jungle lands. They were noted too for their village organization under a headman and for their pride of race which showed itself in their adherence to their own language and to their traditional customs and beliefs. To this area Mohammed Ali had been appointed as District Officer after his final I.C.S.<sup>1</sup> year in England. A Moslem from Lucknow, he spoke Hindi and Urdu, but did not yet know Santali.

He mounted the rough track between the rice fields where under the hot midday sun men stooped to cut the last of the rice, and women were carrying it in large bundles on their heads up to the village threshing-floor. At the entrance of the village he was greeted courteously in Hindi by the village headman and led by him to the camping site on a stretch of grassland where small boys were herding the cattle and playing Santal tunes on bamboo flutes.

After the preliminary exchange of compliments

<sup>1</sup> Indian Civil Service.

Mohammed Ali led to the object of his visit, namely, the affairs of the village for whose supervision he was responsible. The village formed part of a large Government estate, the Damin-i-Koh, taken over as a special administrative area after the Santal tribal rebellion of 1855, when the oppression of Hindu landlords and moneylenders had driven the aboriginals into open warfare.

"What about the taxes this year?"

The headman looked at him a moment before replying. "That is always the first question asked by the Collector Sahib when he is a new Sahib. The old Sahibs know that we Santals do not like paying rent for this land. The people say: 'Our ancestors made<sup>1</sup> this land; Sing Bonga, the god in the sky, gives the rain and the sun. Why should we pay rent for it?' It is true that there are no landlords here. For that we are thankful, because when we visit our relatives in villages outside the white stones<sup>2</sup> we hear tales of oppression and we see great misery. Yet here the rains were not good this year. You can see on the threshing-ground how short are the rice heads, how thin the grains. Many men will be poor. They will have to borrow money and rice after they have paid their tax. But they will pay, and I shall take it all to the office. I shall not fail."

"Good," said Mohammed Ali. "Have there been many other things for you to see to?" he added, mindful of a question sheet in his pocket headed "Rights and Duties of Headmen."

"There is always much to do for us who rule," replied his companion gravely. "Am I not the head-

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* cleared it of jungle.

<sup>2</sup> Stones which mark the boundary of the Government estate.

man of this village, and are not all the people in my care? We Santals do not like that disputes between us, about land, about cattle, about our families, should go to the law courts. It is our custom to settle them ourselves. Therefore I, with the panchayet, must listen to all these cases and must give decisions. Then I must see that the forests in our village lands are protected. I must order the men to take care of the roads and paths within our boundaries. This year we have not yet done this because in the dry weather, when we mend our roads and our houses, many irrigation channels cracked in the great heat, and I had to summon the men to repair them. All these things must I do, and I must till my own lands and reap my harvest and repair my house. Yes, and be present at all the festivals for naming children and for marriages, when we drink the rice beer. All the day, all the time I am thinking and working, thinking and working."

"I know you must be busy," said Mohammed Ali. "But you have your assistants and the watchman and the panchayet. Do they not help you?"

"Yes, they are there. The panchayet I always consult, for without their agreement nothing can be done. I am not complaining. My family have been headmen in this village since it was first founded by my ancestor. You will understand, Collector Sahib, how I must work for my people. You also work for us. You and I are both rulers of the people."

The headman had invited the District Officer to meet the panchayet, so after the day's work was over, Mohammed Ali found his way up the darkening village street. On the mud platform roofed with thatch, opposite the headman's house, the heads of the families were assembled. A chair, the only one in the village,

was fetched from the headman's house, and placed for Mohammed Ali. A hurricane lantern on the ground lit up the dark faces, the broad cheekbones, the curly hair of the Santal tribesmen. It flickered, too, on a gourd of water hung high up in the thatch. This water was for the spirits of former headmen, so that they might not become thirsty as they listened to the discussions below.

After the exchange of polite greetings Mohammed Ali asked if there were any complaints to make to the Government. Silence fell, while all eyes turned to an elderly man of very dignified appearance who had evidently been chosen as spokesman. Speaking in Hindi, the second language used by most Santals when doing business with outsiders who could not master their difficult language, the old man said slowly :

"It is known to all—and without doubt to the Government also—that in this year the rains were poor. Many of our crops died, others bore little, and when we took our rice to sell in the market, they told us that this year they would pay less for our rice than last year, and behold we received so little money that everyone therefore is poor. We are not yet hungry as in a famine year. But our rice bundles in our houses are not full. There will come a time when we shall eat borrowed food and that does not taste good. If we pay our taxes, shall we have any money to buy cloth for our clothes? We should like to know why the headman demanded full payment from us this year, when he knew, and all knew, how poor we were. Can you tell us perhaps of your wisdom the reason why the Government makes us pay taxes this year?"

"The Government does not wish to inflict injury on poor men," said the District Officer. "You know

that when the harvest is very bad then the taxes are suspended. But this year it was not so bad. Therefore your taxes and the taxes of many other villages, who also are poor, will go to pay for things which will help you. Some go to pay your headman and his assistants ; some for the teacher in the village school ; some for the school where the teachers are trained ;<sup>1</sup> some for the hospital ; some for the new roads where the motor bus runs ; some for the bridges over the rivers ; some for the postman who brings you money orders from your brothers in the tea-gardens."

"Some of those things are good," said the spokesman slowly. "We like the hospital now. Our fathers did not like it. The roads and bridges are good ; we use them. The schools—we Santals do not like them very much. They make our young men go away to the towns. What good is a school to those who grow rice and tend cattle ? It is only the Christian Santals who like schools."

Mohammed Ali was reflecting on the Santals' steady opposition to modern education, when a younger man leaned forward. "All our money then is for things which can help us ? Some of us thought that it went far away to make men rich in big cities."

Murmurs of agreement rose among the ranks and there was a shuffling of feet and muttered conversation. Mohammed Ali wondered how he could explain to the Santals the connection between their village and its taxes and the general political system of the country, knowing how much the Santals disliked contact with outsiders. "You see this nim tree ?" he said, pointing overhead. "The leaves which rustle, they are like

<sup>1</sup> The schools and hospitals in this area are under a Christian mission and subsidized by Government.

villages, yours and all the rest. The small branches which hold the leaves together, they are districts like your district of Santal Parganas which unites all the villages in it. The big branches which hold together the little branches, they are the provinces like your province of Bihar and Orissa with the capital at Patna. The main trunk of the tree which unites all the branches, that is India. Just as the leaves receive goodness from the sun and send it to the branches and to the whole tree, so some of the revenue from your lands goes to the district, some to the province, and some to Delhi, the chief city of India."

The Santals murmured the names over to themselves. To many Patna was a new name, as was Delhi to most of them. Finally one man asked: "Who lives in Delhi, that he must receive from us poor Santals money from our lands?"

"The Viceroy, the great Sahib, lives in Delhi," said Mohammed Ali. "He is the headman of all India as your headman is of your village."

A long mumble of conversation went on while the Santals discussed backwards and forwards what they had heard, turning now and then to the young Christian school teacher in the rear for further information. At last the old spokesman said: "We have heard. You can tell the great Sahib how poor we are. If we send him money perhaps he will send the motor bus nearer to this village so that our women can more easily take their vegetables to market."

#### THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

In this Santal village was preserved the village community with the form of village government which once

prevailed over a large part of India. Before the advent of railways and telegraphs, when roads and bridges were few and communication therefore slow and difficult, the villages were isolated units, self-sufficient in their economic life and in their form of government. In village affairs authority was wielded by the panchayet, or council, originally consisting of all male adults, as it does in Santal villages to this day. Later the panchayet became a smaller group of five or more leading men. Acting with the headman it kept law and order, took care of roads and forests, settled disputes, and dealt with all offences, except such as had to go before the higher courts.

In the old village system there was present the simplest form of the necessary machinery of government of modern times. The panchayet was the legislature, deliberating, suggesting, agreeing. The headman was the executive, carrying out the decisions of the panchayet, and acting with their approval. The keeper of records, the watchman and other village officials were the administrative services, doing certain necessary work for the whole community.

During the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries the general British policy in ruling India was towards autocracy and centralization. The officials had wide powers in the districts, their authority was based on their personal prestige among the people, and the general lines of government were laid down by the headquarters of the provinces and by the central government. This system made for efficiency and for control from the centre, and under it was built up the well-merited reputation of the Indian Civil Service as the finest in the world.

While, however, the old machinery of government



was functioning, new ideas were pouring into India. New wine was threatening to burst the old bottles. Through the schools and colleges, through every means of contact with the West, especially through the travel of Indians to Europe, came the disturbing ideas. Democracy was in the air, and to educated Indians the natural change in the machinery of government was towards a Parliamentary form. Their *iqāt*, their self-respect, their position in the eyes of the world, demanded that India should be governed on modern lines, and that Indians should control the machinery of government.

In the framing of a new constitution for India there were two main problems : to provide a system of local government which would be a training ground in democratic control for India's millions ; and to create a machinery of provincial and central government which would be adequate for the needs of the country.

The panchayets had fallen into disuse in many parts of India in the nineteenth century, for the same reasons which had caused the break-up of the village community, partly political, partly economic, partly social. It was realized, however, in the twentieth century that in the panchayets lay the foundation of popular government in local affairs. They were therefore officially revived, and about 1920 acts were passed in most provinces authorizing panchayets—whose members were to be either elected by the villagers or appointed with their approval—to deal with petty criminal and civil cases and to promote sanitation, road-mending, and other common concerns of the village. Over wider areas the District Boards controlled roads, schools, dispensaries, and other local matters.

On the solid foundations of local government had to be erected the political superstructure, which inevitably

involved intricate questions of voting and representation. The Indian village system was to talk things out, however long it took, not to vote on them, and in a close-knit community like a village unity would be impossible with a minority which felt aggrieved. To constitution-makers, however, problems of representation and votes loomed large, and over all was the dominating problem of the ultimate control of the machinery.

The Government of India Act of 1919 set up a constitution of which only the bare outlines can be indicated here. There was a Central All-India Government at Delhi, which dealt with certain so-called "central subjects."<sup>1</sup> Each Province had a Provincial Government which dealt with "provincial" subjects over certain of which the Central Government had no control. Those subjects coming entirely under the Provincial Governments were known as "transferred subjects," and were, as in England, under a Minister responsible to the Legislature. The remaining "reserved subjects" were dealt with by the Governor in Council, that is by the Executive. The All-India Legislature was called the Legislative Assembly, the Provincial ones the Legislative Councils. The division into "transferred" and "reserved" subjects was known as Dyarchy, and was intended to train Indians in the control and administration of certain essential features of government as a step towards handing over to them full responsibility. The new constitution was allied to an increasing "Indianization" of all the administrative services, especially the Indian Civil Service.

<sup>1</sup> See List of Central and of Provincial subjects at end of chapter.

## THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

To the young educated Indian of to-day, the all-important question with regard to the government of India is : who is to control the machinery ? He looks back and sees more than two thousand years of Indian history when no European power ruled in India. He may acknowledge the contribution made by Britain to the unification and prosperity of the land during her one hundred and seventy-five years of rule. He may listen to the constitution-makers arguing about representation of communities and votes. But to him the major issue of the constitution is whether the British Parliament shall continue to be the final arbiter of India's destiny, or whether India will reach the same position as Canada and the other Dominions, and as an "autonomous nation within the Empire" have complete control over all her internal affairs.

During the seventy-five years after the Mutiny the stage was set for the development of a Nationalist Movement in India. This movement, though it was aimed at political nationalism, had also its economic and intellectual forms of expression. The soil in which the Nationalist Movement in India grew was fertilized by a reawakening of all sides of Indian life. As "Swaraj" stood for home rule in politics, so "Swadeshi" stood for the promotion of Indian industries, which had suffered from competition with British trade interests. There was a literary revival of vernacular literature, in which the writings of the poet Rabindranath Tagore played a large part in Bengal. In the sphere of art modern schools of painting arose, the best known being that in Calcutta under the leadership of Abanindranath and Goganendranath Tagore, nephews of the poet.

In the growth of the National Congress the early stages of political nationalism in India can be followed. Although by the Councils Act of 1861 a few Indians had been admitted into the Legislative Councils, the members were nominated and not elected, and the powers of the Councils were strictly limited. It was therefore an event of the first importance when in 1885 the first National Congress was held in Bombay. It aimed, in its own words, "at forming the germ of a native Parliament which if properly conducted will constitute in a few years an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institution." At the meeting in Calcutta in the following year the President of the Congress recalled the days of India's great past, and paid tribute to the relations between Great Britain and India in these words: "It is under the civilizing rule of the Queen and the people of England that we meet here together, hindered by none, and are freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear and without the least hesitation." In 1890 some of the leaders of the Congress visited England, and spoke in public meetings about their aims and aspirations. Sir Surendranath Banerji, one of the Fathers of Indian Nationalism, said in a speech at the Oxford Union: "England is the home of representative institutions; from England as the centre, representative institutions have spread far and wide until this country has justly been called the mother of free nations. The people of India are children of that mother and they claim their birthright, they claim to be admitted into the rights of British citizens and British fellow-subjects."

To appreciate the significance of these early Congress days it is important to realize that in England and

among the English in India there were two schools of thought about Indian Nationalism. One, the largest, regarded the Indians as a subject race, unfit to rule themselves, seditionists when they criticized, and rebels when they opposed, any act of the British rulers. The other, while not wholly convinced of the ability of Indians for self-government, was nevertheless sufficiently tinged with the Liberal ideas of the day to sympathize with Indian aspirations. To many English people the early Congress leaders appeared as rebels and seditionists. To the rising tide of young Indians they began to appear as heroes and martyrs.

Ideas in India moved quickly, far more quickly than was generally realized in England. The victory of the Japanese in the war against Russia of 1904-5 made a deep impression on Indians, who saw in the Japanese success the triumph of an Oriental nation over a despotic European power. In 1907 an event occurred which fanned the flame of nationalism to white heat. Lord Curzon, then Viceroy, proposed to divide for administrative purposes the immense province of Bengal, which then included Bihar and Orissa and Assam, and to form a new province consisting of Eastern Bengal and Assam. This "Partition of Bengal" produced an outburst of popular fury at breaking up the unity of the Bengali people. A boycott of British goods was declared, foreign goods were burnt on bonfires in the streets, and the Swadeshi movement to use only Indian-made goods was inaugurated. The song *Bande Mataram*, "I salute the mother, the mother of us all, the motherland," became the song alike of the home industries movement and of the political movement of which it was the handmaid.

Twelve years passed. The Great War was over, and

India had taken her part in it as a member of the Empire. In that great struggle of the nations she had advanced far along the road of Nationalism. She had taken part in discussions on the rights of nations to self-determination. At the Peace Conference she had had separate representation, as had the self-governing Dominions. In the League of Nations she had her own seat, thus tacitly in the eyes of the world establishing her right to Dominion status. Now her demands were clear and insistent: that the path to full self-government should be open to her, and that she should see the stages ahead leading towards that goal. To an increasing extent Indians had been sharing in the administration of their country as well as in its legislatures. Now, however, the logical step to Indian Nationalists seemed to be the granting of full responsibility to the Central Government, making India a self-governing Dominion. The Government of India Act of 1919, establishing the present system of government in India as an experimental stage, was to most Indian Nationalists a great disappointment. Following this Act, which they regarded as a breach of faith on the part of the British Government, there succeeded first the Rowlatt Acts giving the Government emergency powers to deal with political prisoners, and then the Amritsar shooting—all in the same year. The British promises were believed to be worthless, and the progressive emancipation of India a sham.

Round the figure of one man the history of the subsequent years has centred. Mahatma Gandhi saw in the goal of political freedom for India the liberation of her soul. He was convinced that complete unification in India would never be achieved while she was bound by leading-strings to the British Parliament.

The Non-Co-operation movement was launched by him as a spiritual protest against political injustice, and he believed that this *satyagraha*, or passive resistance, was the expression in political life of the Hindu religious doctrine of *ahimsa*, non-violence. Mr Gandhi, like other great political leaders in India, emphasized the relation between economic and social reform and politics. His advocacy of khaddar or homespun cloth, and of the removal of untouchability in the Harijan movement, have been essential parts of his political programme.

During the years since the War there has been a widening breach between the Indians and the British in India. Disappointed and disillusioned, many Indians have lost faith in the goodwill of the British people, who on their part have to a great extent misunderstood and failed to appreciate the ideas and hopes underlying Indian Nationalism. The breach between the races has been manifest both in the political and in the social sphere. The apparent failure of many British people to bridge the gulf and to establish good relations when opportunity offered has been a tragic and a fatal element in the situation. On the other side, however, must be put the countless good relationships between individuals of both races which have persisted through all political differences. The name of Lord Irwin, Viceroy from 1926-31, stands to the people of India for one who tried to understand their needs and their desires. Relationships based on such sympathy and understanding could be found in every sphere—official, non-official, missionary. To the many paradoxes about India must be added one more: that an Indian may speak with invective against the British race and with affection and admiration for many individual Britons.



#### AT HOME IN THE CITY

People are everywhere, everywhere. In a very early morning, one of the first things I noticed when I stepped out of my room was the sound of the city. It was a sound I had never heard before. It was a sound that was full of life, full of energy, full of hope. It was a sound that was full of the city, full of the city, full of the city.





## THE TASKS OF GOVERNMENT

"Yes, indeed. I wonder if any government in the world has to face the same tasks as the Government of India."

The speaker was an English journalist sitting in the veranda of Motilal Parekh's beautiful bungalow on Malabar Hill in Bombay, looking out over the sparkling waters of the Indian Ocean. Seated on long cane chairs were Motilal Parekh with his brother Mohan, whom he had persuaded to stay over after their return from the pilgrimage, and Narayan Tilak, the brother of Motilal's wife, who was a member of the Legislative Assembly in Delhi. Bending over an English newspaper at the edge of the veranda was Manilal, Motilal's eldest son, who had had fever while working on his bridge over the Jumna and had come home for short leave.

Turning to his host, the journalist said: "It would be very interesting, Mr Parekh, to hear how you, as a member of the Bombay Legislative Council, see the tasks of Government in the provinces. It is there it seems to me that the important tasks lie, especially if the Provinces are to be made into autonomous units."

"The main tasks of Provincial Governments," said Motilal Parekh, "seem to me to be these. We have first of all to make some kind of a unity of the province, to draw together all the different religious communities, and to overcome the divisions caused by distance and by language. Here in this province we have at least three main languages, and thirteen others each spoken by more than one thousand people. Of the religious communities we have Hindus of all castes, Jains, Moslems, Parsis, Jews, Christians, and a number of

Animists. In this unification, too, we have to take special care of certain communities who are not able yet to stand for their own rights and who might get crushed out in the modern democratic process. I am thinking of people like the aborigines and the criminal tribes. I consider the work done among them by Christian missions to be wholly admirable. No one else would have had the patience and devotedness which they have given to those backward people. Probably, however, in this province our chief task lies in the public services, in health and education and irrigation. This year, for instance, in the Deccan the Famine Code had to be put in operation after the rains failed. Railways, of course, are an All-India concern, but we have other forms of communications to deal with, such as ports and inland waterways. When I look around and see the achievements of some of the Indian States in matters like education, for there are one or two who are very much ahead of us there, I wonder whether their government of enlightened autocracy does not accomplish more than our attempts at democracy. Every time we want an extension of education the province has to find the money for it; it has to go through the Legislative Council; and what tax-payers like adding to the budget?"

"You sound as though you had caught a certain modern European scepticism about democracy, Mr Parekh," said the journalist. "Is that because you think democracy has been tried in the West and found wanting, or because you think it will not work in India?"

Manilal from the edge of the veranda broke in: "You cannot say that democracy will not work here until it has been tried. And it will never be really tested while England holds the leading strings. Give

us home rule, Sir, and then we will see what form of government suits us best."

Motilal turned to his brother-in-law. "Tell us how all this looks to you in Delhi."

"One of the hardest things we have to do in Delhi is to train ourselves to think in terms of All-India. We all come from a province and naturally our provincial point of view looms large. *You* have to achieve unity in each province. We have to think of unity for all India, and of directing the central services along national lines. That may have been easy for the English official when he did it as an overlord in times past. It is by no means so easy for the Indian legislator to-day."

"What do you in Delhi think about this question of Federation, Mr Tilak," asked the journalist, his mind full of the discussions of the recent Round Table Conferences and their attempts to reach an agreement on the form of a constitution for All-India.

"It is a very peculiar situation," was the reply. "Obviously some form of Federation is essential if British India and the Indian States are to present a united front to the world. Internally we shall each pursue our own way, though certain services such as railways, posts and telegraphs, and currency relate to both sections. But besides our problems of internal government we have to face our relations with Great Britain in the Empire, and with the rest of the world in the League of Nations. Where you western nations have through long periods evolved your democracy and your foreign relations, we have to do it in one generation."

"There is yet another side to all this," said Mohan. "In my travels across India I have been struck with the millions of people who have no voice in the government, but whose welfare must be the first concern of

any ruler. In some way the machinery of government must be related to the needs of the people. In old days any subject had the right to petition the ruler, but they cannot do that now."

"Some of us think," said Manilal, breaking in again, "that the needs of the masses in India are the all-important thing—more important than political machinery. When I am living among the workmen on the Jumna I learn more about the needs of the people than from reading all the books and newspapers. Here is a task on which depends the future of India as a nation. Such a task is important enough to overcome caste divisions, great enough even to unite Hindus and Moslems in facing it."

"It is the realization of this task," said Narayan Tilak, "which I believe in the end will bring British and Indians together."

### LIST OF CENTRAL AND PROVINCIAL SUBJECTS

CENTRAL	PROVINCIAL	
	<i>Transferred</i>	<i>Reserved</i>
Defence		
Foreign Relations		
Relations with Indian States	Local Self-Government	Irrigation
Railways	Public Health	Land Revenue
Shipping	Pilgrimages	Famine Relief
Air Communications	Education	Justice
Posts and Telegraphs	Public Works	Industries
Customs	Agriculture	Police
Currency	Fisheries	
Civil and Criminal Law	Co-operative Societies	
Commerce and Banking	Excise	
Industries		
Factory and Mines Legislation		
Surveys and Research		

This table, taken from Vol. I of the Report of the Simon Commission, is not exhaustive.

CHAPTER VII  
CUSTOM AND CASTE  
AMONG THE GOLDSMITHS

*Ram, Ram, sach hai ?*  
*Sach bolo, jita hai ?*<sup>1</sup>

FOUR men were carrying a corpse on a bamboo stretcher and chanting in a sing-song voice. Shuffling their feet they moved in a quick trot, the bier swaying to the rhythm of the chant. Around them were other men, singing, beating their hands, clashing small cymbals. It was June, the height of the hot season. The river was flowing in narrow blue channels between stretches of white sand. At the burning ghat by the water's edge the pyre of wood had been prepared, and the body was laid on it. A Brahmin priest with the triple thread over one shoulder was guarding the sacred fire near by. The brothers of the dead man circled round the pyre, laying on it ghi and rice as offerings to the departed spirit. Then the mourners sat down while the priest walked backwards and forwards repeating verses from the Vedas. Finally Kishan, the elder brother, took from the sacred fire a burning stick with which he lighted the pyre and touched the dead man's eyes and mouth. When the burning was over, the men bathed in the river, collected the bones from the ashes and cast them into the water, calling on the dead man's name and on Ram to save him.

<sup>1</sup> "Ram, Ram, is it true ?  
Speak truly, is he saved ?"

Accompanied by the Brahmin priest who was to collect his due reward, they returned to the city through the lanes of the potters and the weavers, to the street of the goldsmiths. Some of the shops showed plain gold bangles, some filigree work, some, including the shop of the brothers, engraved designs and raised work for setting stones.

The front part of their house was an open shop with a small room at one side where special visitors could be received. On a ledge at the entrance several pairs of green and red leather shoes showed who was within. Across a small courtyard behind the shop were the women's quarters. There all was a scene of mourning. The widow of the dead man crouched in a dark corner, her head wrapped in her sari, her little daughter huddled beside her. In the middle of the veranda sat three Brahmin widows hired to come as mourners, who lifted their voices every now and then in a funeral chant.

After sunset, when the men's funeral feast was over, a young girl of thirteen, carrying a brass water-pot, limped over to the corner where the widow still crouched. "Come, daughter-in-law, here is water. You have fasted long, and now the sun is down you may drink." The widow lifted her cupped hands and drank eagerly. "Why do you serve me thus?" she asked in a faint voice. "You, who are the wife of the brother of my father-in-law, you should be served by me." "I am sorry for you," the girl replied. "Perhaps one day my husband will die and I shall be left a widow like you—perhaps also I shall bear no son to perform the *śradh*<sup>1</sup> for his father."

"Ai, ai," wailed the young widow, rocking herself

<sup>1</sup> Death ceremonies.

to and fro in an agony of grief. "His spirit will not rest, it will wander to and fro, it will not find the place of its rebirth, it will not be nourished and cherished—all because I did not bear a son to him. Ai, ai."

Sitting on the roof, hoping for a cool night breeze, the other women of the house were discussing the fact that the dead man had no son. "Alas, my first-born has no son," the old mother said. "How happy I was when he was born. What good *baina* we made of ginger and molasses and butter on the twelfth day after his birth for the midwife to take round to the houses of the brethren who live in this street. And then they came, all his male relatives, and he was presented to them in the courtyard here. The barber woman came to cut our nails and oil our hair; all my friends came to bring me presents. Ah! Ram, that was a great day."

The other women murmured their comments and the old woman went on, "In his fifth year his ears were bored by his father's eldest brother and later he was initiated into the caste of the goldsmiths; he was made a true Sonar. And then came his wedding. Ai, Sita, ai, Ram! that was inauspicious, that wedding. Yet the horoscopes were consulted and omens taken to find the lucky day. At the wedding we fed the Brahmins so well and they repeated the Vedic verses. All was in order and according to custom. Yet now he is dead, and he has no son. Alas, for him!"

"Ah, well," said one of the other women. "Doubtless she did something wrong, she omitted some religious duty, and therefore he has died. It is our custom to think that a widow has caused the death of her husband. Therefore she must be the servant of this household, she and her daughter, for we must feed them and pro-



vide for them. She will only have one meal a day and wear a widow's coarse sari and no jewels. Even so it is an expense for us."

Kishan's wife leaned forward, and said in a whisper, "Perhaps they will arrange another marriage for her." A shocked gasp ran round the circle. "You know that we true Sonars do not allow widow re-marriage, only the other Sonars do it, that low crowd. But we are not rich; and which is worse, to re-marry her, or to keep her and her child and feed them all their days? Perhaps it can be arranged with the caste. Who knows? But hush, do not say anything, for it must not be said that our family is to do a disgraceful thing. I think perhaps our men will make a big feast to the brethren, and to the Brahmins too, and then perhaps no one will object."

To the young Hindu widow, and indeed to the whole family, the death of her husband without a son was a tragedy. They believed that only a son could perform the death ceremonies in such a way that the dead man's spirit would find rest until the time came for its rebirth in some other human being. Moreover in the eyes of a Hindu family the line ended if a man had no son, for his daughter on marriage became part of another family. In a less educated household, such as that of the Sonars, the widow was made to feel the stigma both of being a widow and of having no son. In other more educated families, although the widow might not re-marry and would have only the one meal a day and poor clothing, she might by her services to the family endear herself to them and have a real place in the household.

A few weeks later Kishan and his brother Saran were sitting in their shop after the evening meal, listening

intently to a low murmur of conversation which came from the visitors' room. Presently someone shuffled into shoes at the entrance and went clattering down the street. "Listen, the thief has gone," said Kishan. "Doubtless our uncle will now go into the room of our special gods to put cakes and flowers before them, hoping for good luck. That man who brought the jewellery frequents fairs and may come often to deal with us." "Our father's brother is full of wisdom," said Saran. "To-morrow he will break up those bangles, or whatever the thief brought, and melt them down, and who will know? After all, to deal in such stolen goods is the custom of our caste."

Presently the blind uncle joined them and they set out together for the panchayet of their caste. From the neighbouring street of the brass metal-workers came sounds of drums and cymbals where a wedding was in progress. At the house of the leading Sonar, who was chairman of the panchayet, each man left his shoes outside, murmured the customary salutation of "Jai Ram" to those near, and took up a place on the floor.

The first business to be discussed was that of a member of the caste who had been detected mixing gold with an amount of alloy not sanctioned by the caste rules. Out of this illegal action he had been making considerable profit. The crime was admitted by the guilty man; indeed he could not well do otherwise, for it had been the subject of talk over the hookahs in the street all the week. The task of the panchayet being to settle the penalty, it was finally decided that he was to pay a fine to the brotherhood to go into their fund for charitable purposes, and to give a feast to all the panchayet at their next meeting.

Kishan nudged Saran when this decision was

announced. "You see," he whispered, "they are not in a mood to-day to pardon easily any breach of rules. Let us wait until next time. After the feast they will be in a good humour and then we can speak of this business of the re-marriage of our sister-in-law." "Your counsel is wise, brother," replied Saran. "We will wait. But, look, we must watch our father's brother with that stolen jewellery. Often he has put in more than the permitted amount of alloy, and you see to-night there are some sharp eyes watching where every man's profits come from. Our caste is strict in these matters. It rules our business as well as our homes, and we must abide by its customs."

#### A MOSLEM HOME

Karima sat on the edge of the veranda watching the shadow of the high wall move slowly across the courtyard. Her embroidered green leather slippers, with up-curling toes, had fallen off. She was swinging her legs, for it was very hot, and the movement made a slight breeze around her bare feet with their toes and heels tipped with red dye. Her wide green muslin trousers were tied round the waist and held by a band at the ankle; her white cotton bodice fitted closely to her slim figure. Down her back hung a long thick pigtail, and over her smooth hair was a light yellow muslin veil reaching to her waist.

"Wah, thou little one, so thou art awake." She poked her finger at the baby lying on its back on the charpoy. "Here is our rice water. The blessing of Allah be on thee." She gave the baby a drink from the brass vessel and finished the rest herself. "That is better. It is the month of Ramzan, but thou and

I do not fast. Thou and I are too young. We can drink rice water and eat curds while our mother and our aunt and all in the house go without food, without drink, all day. By the Prophet, it is hot. I go to fetch more water."

She pattered across the courtyard, her wide trousers flapping, her pigtail swinging. In the cooking-place by the women's quarters her mother was superintending the preparation of the meal which was permitted after sundown, boiled rice and curds and dates. Everyone was heavy and listless, for the heat was intense, and since sunrise neither food nor liquid had passed their lips.

As she was filling her brass tumbler from the big earthen jar of rice water, an unfamiliar sound struck Karima's ear. Music! What fun! But how dreadful in their street which had a mosque in it! While the Moslem servants were exclaiming: "The curse of the Prophet be on the dogs of Hindus who defile our mosques with profane music!" Karima was running across the men's courtyard to a spy-hole known to her in her father's office. Peeping through, she saw the Hindu wedding procession from the brass-makers' street; the young bridegroom carried on a chair, the band of cymbals and trumpets and drums behind. Fortunately it was a quarter of the town which offered no chances of a riot. All the houses were large and closely shuttered on the side facing the street, and there were no crowds about to join issue in a street fight between Hindus and Moslems. When the band passed the mosque Karima saw her blind grandfather come out on to the steps. He had spent all day in the mosque listening to the priest reading the Koran, and it was anathema to him to hear the blaring music forbidden in

the teaching of the Prophet Mohammed. Just as her father came into his office, the sun set and the call to prayer resounded four times, once from each minaret of the mosque. Hassan Ali took his prayer mat and went up on to the roof whither the other men of the household had gone. Facing Mecca, the holy city of the Prophet, each man fell on his knees and went through the evening prayer, touching his forehead to the ground. All over the Moslem quarter men were doing the same, repeating their belief that there is one God and Mohammed is his prophet.

After the prayer came the first cooling drink of the day, and then her father sat in the women's courtyard, talking with Karima and smoking his hookah while waiting for the evening meal. "What thinkest thou, Karima? Wouldst like to go to school?"

Karima looked up in amazement at her father. She was stitching a border for the edge of her shawl, laying gold and silver sequins on a band of gold tissue. "I, go to school? But surely I am too old for school? Are not my friends Fatima and Gulzar to be married soon? And they are not many years older than I. I am *nine*," she reminded her father with emphasis and dignity.

Her mother and aunt had crossed the courtyard, dressed in the tight white cotton trousers worn by Moslem women in the privacy of the home, and a little bodice and light veil like Karima's. Her mother had heard her daughter's last remark and ventured to address her husband. "You will surely not do as my friend's husband did and send Karima to a European school? Behold my friend is in purdah as I am. She never goes out save in a *bourka*,<sup>1</sup> covered from head to

<sup>1</sup> A long thick veil worn by Moslem women out of doors.

foot; even as I do. And yet her children are dressed in English clothes, and her girls talk about being doctors and teachers. Girls should not think of such things. Widows may perhaps be teachers, but then so many of the Moslem widows marry again. We are not like the Hindus in that. Surely you will not put ideas into Karima's head about what a girl should do?"

"Thou knowest, Karima," said her father, "that it was intended that thou shouldst marry Mohammed Ali, thy cousin. We Moslems believe that it is well for cousins to marry, for by this means is the property kept together in the family. I would not let a betrothal be made before he went to England for thou wert very young then, and his father considered he should be free. Now his father is dead, and I have no sons, and the marriage would be pleasing to us all. But now he is in the I.C.S. he will want a wife who can do more than sit at home and cook sweetmeats. Thou must learn to read and write so that thou canst visit and talk with the English *mems.*"

After the evening meal Karima took her baby sister up on to the roof. Under the stars the stones were still too hot to sit on after the heat of the day, so Karima sat on a small cane stool and rocked the baby. In a long involved chant she told her all about the handsome cousin, Mohammed Ali, who had gone to work among the Santals. "Hear thou, little fat one, I shall marry him, but not yet. First I shall go to the school where the purdah girls go, behind the high walls. There I shall learn so much. I shall become so wise. Now I can repeat much of the Koran by heart. Thou hast heard me. But first, before school begins, we shall have Mohurram. For the festival I will make thee a

tiny shrine to put in the imambara<sup>1</sup> in our house. It shall have red and yellow banners. We Moslems must not have pictures. They are idolatrous, so says the holy Prophet. But we have instead lights and they become thousands and thousands of sparkles in the mirrors of the imambara. Hearest thou? No, thou art asleep this long while. Come, we will go to bed. Here is another day of Ramzan gone."

#### BRAHMINS AND OUTCASTES

With a brief announcement of his name and lineage the speaker folded his hands together before his face, bowed, and stepped down from the high embankment between the rice fields on to the road. He was a tall spare man, dressed in a dhoti, the Brahmin thread over one shoulder, a tuft of uncut hair on the back of his head. The man he was addressing was short and fat and elderly, carrying a staff and a small bundle in his hand. After a similar salutation announcing his name and lineage, the respective identities of the men were revealed to each other. Krishna Aiya was the leading Brahmin in a village in the Tinnevely district of the Madras Presidency, and Srinivasa Acharya was the new priest coming to the large temple of Siva to take the place of his uncle who had died leaving no direct heirs to succeed him in the priesthood.

It was November and the north-east monsoon had already sent rain-laden clouds over the land and given the rice lands a good soaking. In the fields on either side of the road the women were busy transplanting the seedling rice from the seed beds to the larger fields. The two men walked along slowly in the hot damp

<sup>1</sup> Special place of worship at the Mohurram festival.

atmosphere, while Krishna Aiya told the priest details of his uncle's sudden death and the decision of the Brahmins to invite him to take his place.

"You have not been to this village for many years," said Krishna. "You may not remember that we Brahmins are few here. The people are mostly cultivators. It is good rice land, and the cows and goats do well too."

"That is good news," said the priest, thinking of his dues, which would often be paid in kind. "And are they pious here? Do they live according to the scriptures and do they have respect for their priests and other Brahmins?"

"Yes, they are pious," said Krishna. "They had great respect for your uncle and obeyed his instructions in all matters of religion. Last year we spent in this village Rs. 2000 on festivals and Rs. 8000 on rebuilding temples. The people brought their money readily. But they do not spend as much as they did formerly on family occasions such as weddings or funerals. They prefer to spend their money in the market town, seven miles away, and at the weekly fairs. They are ever running after something new. It is we Brahmins who preserve the customs of our people, and who care that all shall be done as it was ordained in the beginning. Two of my sons now are Brahmachari.<sup>1</sup> The second was admitted by the Upanayana ceremony which was performed last month. It is indeed a great occasion for a boy and for his father."

The priest then put a discreet question about whether Krishna had other children.

"By the grace of Siva," answered Krishna, "I have three sons. For my third son last week the Chaulam

<sup>1</sup> Young Brahmin boy under tutelage of a guru or religious teacher.



ceremony was performed. The divine grass was put on his head and invoked to protect him, and the barber shaved his head. I hope to have a fourth son shortly. I have performed over the mother the male-producing ceremony, and each time so far it has been successful. Siva be praised, I have no daughters for whom I must give dowries on their marriage. For my eldest brother has died leaving two daughters who are of marriageable age and I must find dowries for them."

They were nearing the temple which stood on a slight eminence, its newly white-washed walls and peaked, many-coloured roof standing out above the green of the surrounding fields. At that moment a group of men appeared on the side of the road, but on seeing the two Brahmins they withdrew hastily, bending low to the ground.

"Do those Pariahs use this road, so near to the temple?" asked the priest in surprise.

"They do not," said Krishna. "But they have petitioned the government to be allowed to use it because it is their direct way to the village. If they are successful we Brahmins shall make a counter-petition to have the road closed. For ten generations this road has been closed to Pariahs, and they will never be successful."

To the Brahmins the outcastes or Pariahs were barely human. They believed that from the head of Brahma came forth the Brahmins, from the arms the Kshattriyas or warriors, from the thighs the Vaisyas or cultivators, from the feet the Sudras or artisans. The outcastes had no part in the divine order of society.

They entered the village through the street of the carpenters, who made all the ploughs and carts for the villagers, and came to the Brahmin quarter round an

open square by a small temple. Looking round him, the priest said to Krishna, "How fortunate it is that we Brahmins have always preserved the culture of our people. Without us in the past it would have perished many times. And to-day it is we who know how things should be done and who therefore have the privileged position among all the castes. See how they salute us," and he looked with profound satisfaction at the deep salaams made by all passers-by to himself and his companion.

Meantime the outcastes who had withdrawn before the Brahmins did not venture again on the road. There were four men and three women, thin, with ill-kempt hair and dirty ragged clothes. Their duties in the caste village were scavenging in the streets and removing refuse. Their home was a village of small mud huts with ragged thatched roofs, set down without any order on a cleared patch of ground. Round the village well, which the rains had filled, a few scraggy goats nibbled at dry stalks thrown down for them, and numerous thin, flea-bitten dogs nosed about among the refuse, whining and scratching. In such surroundings lived ninety-six families, half the total population of the village. They eked out a bare existence doing dirty and degrading work in the village, and endeavouring to cultivate a few acres of the worst land within the village boundaries. Some of them were padials, serfs bound to the land and obliged to perform certain services for the landlord for which they received payment in kind. Some of the more enterprising among the families had emigrated to the tea estates in Ceylon or the Nilgiris. Occasionally the emigrants sent money home to their relatives in the village, and some returned to it with new possessions and new independ-

ence, unwilling to submit to the restrictions of their outcaste state. It was from these that a petition had gone up to government to be allowed to use the village road on which the temple stood.

"Untouchability" means in India living a life entirely apart from the rest of the community. The outcaste group in any village have strictly segregated quarters, and may not approach either the temples or the wells or tanks of the caste people. To touch an outcaste is pollution to a caste Hindu, and in certain parts of the country this pollution is regarded as carrying a distance of nearly twenty yards. In South India the boundary line between caste and outcaste is more sharply marked than in North India, as is also the division between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins.

It is to such people, who have all their lives been treated as less than human beings, that the Christian Church has made the strongest appeal. Not only has Christianity given them a new sense of their own personality, but through it they have found new life in every sphere. Clean, well-built houses, well cultivated fields, protected wells, trees for shade and fruit : in fact, totally new surroundings have been the result of many outcaste villages becoming Christian. Instead of being outcaste from a community, they become part of a new one, and in Mass Movement areas this new Christian community is a large and influential one. Moreover the radical change in the life and outlook of Christian outcastes has so impressed the caste people in certain parts of South India, that they themselves have come to inquire about this new religion which has such power to change the lives of men.

## THE MEANING OF CUSTOM AND CASTE

Everyone in India is born a member of a special community to which his family belongs. If he is a Hindu he is part of the Hindu community, if a Moslem of the Moslem, if a Christian of the Christian community, and so on. Within the great Hindu community, which is nearly four-fifths of the people of India, everyone is born a member of a caste, the caste of his father, and that caste he retains till his death and hands on to his children. Life therefore for each individual is set in a certain framework, and within that framework all his actions and most of his ideas are determined by custom.

In Hindu society no one can marry outside their caste. Formerly betrothals and often marriages took place at a very early age. The Sarda Act of 1931 fixed the age of marriage for boys at sixteen and for girls at fourteen, but the consensus of opinion is that in circles where early marriage is the custom, the Act is not being observed. In both Hindu and Mohammedan society, except in those sections which have adopted western habits, marriages are more a matter for the family than for individual choice, but many such marriages have resulted in happy homes. Children are brought up from birth to conform to the custom of the society they belong to. They learn what food their caste allows them to eat, and with whom they may eat it; they learn how to address their various relatives and how to behave to them; they learn which gods are to be revered and the way in which to worship them. Although in educated households more and more latitude is allowed, in less educated families the sway of custom still holds. The universal answer given by

a villager if asked about the reason for any action or event is : "It is our custom." To them strangers are the followers of "another custom." Even the Christians, who have departed from many customs, have established another set ; and the Christian custom is as much recognized where it prevails as the former Hindu or Moslem custom.

Where life is so regulated the individual grows up in a community which expects adherence to tradition and the customary rules of behaviour. He may be a rebel at heart, but if he wishes to live peaceably with his fellows he must conform at least outwardly to what is required of him. Here and there an individual may defy tradition, as reformers and Christian converts have done and are doing. But they may find themselves left "community-less," and if they cannot find another group with whose customs they can ally themselves, and whose life they can share, they will be lost and unhappy, human beings without a social setting in which to live.

What is caste? Scholars of many languages and many ages have written learned volumes on caste, especially on its origins, and there is not yet any agreement. One of the theories about caste is that it originated as a marriage arrangement when the Aryans came into India to preserve the colour of the fair-skinned invaders by forbidding inter-marriage with the dark-skinned people of the land. In parts of India the higher castes are noticeable for their fairer skins, but it is by no means universally true. Another theory is that caste originated to exalt the Brahmins who were the custodians of religion and culture in India's past, and that they arranged the ranks in society to maintain their position. Yet another theory is that caste originated in occupation, and that the grading of society

in social ranks was due to the belief that certain tasks were honourable, others less honourable, others degrading.

In support of this last theory we can see how everywhere a man's occupation is to a large extent settled by his caste. The son of a cultivator becomes a cultivator, the son of a goldsmith a goldsmith, the son of a weaver a weaver, and so on. From the smallest villages up to the towns, the castes both live and work in separate units, and regulate their work as well as their social life according to caste customs. The boundaries of caste and occupation, however, are not entirely synonymous. Members of the same caste may pursue different occupations, as the Brahmins, who are found in a great many occupations from priests to cultivators. But in general, caste is so much allied to occupation that even Moslem converts from Hinduism kept their separate occupational groups and their social customs. There are Moslem weaver castes, Moslem water carriers, and in these Moslem castes, as in the Hindu castes, there are strict rules forbidding inter-marriage and inter-dining between castes.

Whatever may be the theories about caste, and they will continue to be battle-grounds for scholars, the truth remains that the caste system is the solid basis of Hindu society. It sets man in a community; it ordains all the details of his life; it fixes and regulates his occupation; it prescribes his gods and his religious duties; it colours his outlook on the world. It does this for millions of people, and it has persisted with little change for nearly three thousand years.

One change which is taking place shows in itself the power and attraction of the system. There is a tendency for sections of some castes to detach themselves from

the main stock and endeavour to rise in the social scale by adding a new name, by conforming to the customs of the caste above them, by refusing to eat and to intermarry with lower sections of their own caste. Hence there is a constant shifting and reshuffling going on within the castes themselves, and many of them present to the onlooker a kind of moving staircase, rooted in custom yet rising in the world. Even out-caste and aboriginal peoples, by abstaining from killing cows and adopting other Hindu customs, endeavour to get a foot on the lowest step of the moving staircase and so wriggle their way into the system, showing how much its status and privileges are coveted by those outside it.

For the caste system not only determines the framework of relationships within itself. It makes very clear who are outside the framework. Many of the aboriginal tribes found in the land by the Aryan invaders have been excluded. All Moslems, Christians, Parsis and followers of other faiths are excluded. When therefore a man is said to be a Hindu, it is not only his religion which is designated but his place in society. Hinduism as a religion has many forms from pure monotheistic philosophy to the primitive worship of many gods and spirits. Hinduism as a social system has clearly defined forms, within which custom dictates the manner of life for every individual.

Through the centuries Hinduism has survived the successive invasions of India and held its own. In very recent times new ideas have crept in which are undermining the old beliefs, though it is easy to exaggerate what has been called the breakdown of the caste system. The system stands, and still is the framework of life for millions of people. It is possible

nevertheless to see certain forces at work, some material, some spiritual, which appear to be weakening the rigid walls of caste.

Among the material forces first place can be given to modern economic and industrial conditions. The gathering of workers in large numbers into factories and mines, the necessity for business organization on a large scale sets at naught the careful occupational segregating of workers under the caste system. The conditions of modern city life and of modern travel break down the social separation between the castes. The attractions of the law courts and of modern societies push into the background the old caste *panchayets* which formerly settled all the affairs of the caste, both in business and in social life.

On the spiritual side there are, according to the Census Reports of 1931, three main causes for the gradual breakdown of the rigidity of the caste system. The first of these comes from the reforming groups within Hinduism itself, such as the *Arya Samaj* and the *Servants of India Society*,<sup>1</sup> which seek to extend the idea of brotherhood and mutual service beyond the narrow limits of the caste and to uplift the outcaste people. The second comes from the influence of Christianity with its emphasis on the Fatherhood of God and the equal value of all persons in His sight. And the most recent is the influence of Nationalism, expressed in the social activities of political leaders like Mr Gandhi, seeking to find a national unity which can overcome religious and social divisions.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 129.



## CHAPTER VIII

### NEW LAMPS FOR OLD

THE slender bridge of three bamboo poles tied together swayed as the barefooted Bengali boy ran lightly over it. Grasping one of the supports which leaned precariously towards the bank, he bent down and shouted to a passing *shalti* :

“Greeting, elder sister. How was the market? What didst thou buy to-day?”

A youngish woman in a white cotton sari edged with colour, the usual dress of a Bengali village woman, looked up from the *shalti* she was poling.

“Greeting, little brother. We took to market many cucumbers and chillies and bananas. They are sold. The money is here,” and she patted the knotted end of her sari which hung down her back. “See, I have a new blue bowl,” and she held up one of blue enamel edged with red, a product of Birmingham. “Aunt has some pink cloth for her new blouse,” and she pointed to a bundle of Japanese *crêpe* lying on bars of soap and bottles of oil.

“Oh, sister,” said the youngster in a superior, slightly mocking tone. “Thou shouldst not buy foreign cloth. That does not help Swaraj. Thou shouldst spin and weave in thy idle hours, or at least buy *khaddar*.”

His sister took a firm hold of the long pole. “Idle? What dost *thou* know of work? Perchance thy grandmother may teach thee before thou comest home to us. No one has seen thee work in our house.” With this

parting shot, she gave a vigorous push, and the square blunt nose of the shalti jumped forward. Beyond the banks of the canal, where the flooded fields stretched like an inland sea, the rice was a foot above the water in which its bright green was reflected. Ahead lay the village on rising ground slightly above the level of the water. Trees surrounded it, palms and pipal and feathery bamboos, and among them could be seen the thatched roofs and mud walls of the houses.

By the landing-steps, where fish nets and fishing traps lay out to dry in the sun, two more shaltis were moored. The women came round the corner of the nearest houses where banana plants and cucumber vines looked over the bamboo fences, and saw an unusual sight. By the tank, a large square water hole out of which the mud to build the village had been dug, most of the women and all the children had gathered under some shady mango trees. Among them were some schoolgirls from the city in fresh white saris bordered with scarlet. They were from the school of the lotus flower, and one of them, Uma Dey, shyly plucking at her sari as she talked, was addressing the women.

"We have come here from the city to visit you," she said. "Your village is very nice. We have here some medicines, and here is a nurse with us who will tell you what to do when you have fever, or sore eyes, or if your babies are not well. We have also some pictures. Perhaps you will like to see these and learn to read the letters on them."

While the children pushed in to look at the pictures, the women fell to chattering. They were not quite sure if they liked these schoolgirls visiting them. The older women asked who they were and why they came. What did they want with their medicines and their

pictures? The younger ones, however, said that this was the time of day when the morning tasks were over, and they had leisure to look at new things. It would do no harm. Some gathered round the nurse, asking her casual questions, fingering her box of ointments and bandages, till at last a woman picked up a child with a sore on his leg and held him while the nurse dressed it. Others then had courage to come forward, bringing children with sore eyes, skin complaints, and a number of other ailments.

Meantime another slightly younger group of women had gone to look at the pictures. The schoolgirls showed on the large coloured poster a familiar object like a cow, and then pointed to the Bengali characters. The women repeated the word, laughing at their own efforts, and chiding the children who shouted the names in shrill voices.

On the mud veranda of a house, which had a tiled roof, a teacher was talking to the wife of the village accountant, through whom the visit had been arranged. He had been at the mission school in the big village where the market was held and was friendly with the missionaries. "We are glad you came," his wife said. "For no one ever comes to our village. We are all very ignorant. We know nothing except what our mothers taught us. My mother goes now to the women's society, the Mahila Samiti, in the town where my home was. She says the women learn many things there. But that is in the town. Here in the village no one can read except the father of my son. He would like me to learn to read also."

By the time the girls had to leave, the women had become friendly and were telling them much about their lives and asking many questions. They were specially interested in the nurse, who was of the Khasi tribe in the

Assam hills, and who told them that many of her fellow-countrywomen became nurses and others came into Calcutta to train as teachers. Although as a Christian and a Khasi the nurse was outside caste, yet the women, thinking her a superior person, were rather scandalized at her pursuing what they considered to be a degrading occupation, fit only for sweepers and such low people. Another Christian Khasi girl, the head girl of the school, spoke to the women before they left. "In a little while there will come here to this village some boys from a Christian college in the city. They will talk with the men and boys here. They will show them pictures, and they will tell them about the mosquitoes who give fever and the flies who poison the food. They will show how they live in pools and in rubbish like that"—and she pointed to a scum-covered pool and a heap of refuse at the side of a house. "They will make a campaign with songs and banners to clear up all the pools and rubbish, that there may be no more mosquitoes and flies to make you ill. And they will tell about the co-operative societies in other villages, and how to form a co-operative bank here and save money, that you may not get into debt with the moneylender. Will you not also listen and help in this campaign?"

The women tittered and hid their faces in their saris at the idea of taking part in anything so grand. "No one will take heed of what we say," they murmured. "We are nothing."

"Listen," said the young schoolgirl earnestly. "Who goes to market to sell vegetables? You do. Who portions out the rice and curry? You do. Who keeps the house clean and cares for the children? You do. And yet you say you are nothing. I tell you that women are very important. The men are not every-

thing. You can make them do what you want. When the schoolboys come for this campaign, if you say 'Do not listen, that is boys' talk,' the fathers of your sons will laugh at them. But if you say 'Take heed of this talk. It is wisdom. It will be better for our children to do these things,' then I tell you they will listen. Is it not true?"

In the shaltis going home the girls were full of excitement over their day's work. To some of them who had always lived in a city it was the first time they had ever been in close contact with village life, and they had learned much of how the people lived. As they were getting out of their shaltis at the market village where they would take a bus for Calcutta, an Indian Christian padre with grey hair and a deeply lined face came down to greet them.

"Padre-ji, the people are so poor. They are often ill with malaria in the rains, and with cholera in the hot weather. They are so ignorant. They cannot read. They do not know what is good for their children."

The padre, who had lived nearly fifty years in the villages, listened to their experiences of the day, looking across the rice fields where the villages stood out here and there against the setting sun.

"You are young, and therefore you love all that is new. Your teaching seems to you like new lamps full of brightness and you want to take them to the villages to make all things clear. That is good. Yet in the villages before you came there were old lamps, little wicks in a saucer of oil, and they gave brightness, too, to the lives of the village people. Do you know what were the old lamps?"

The girls shook their heads and turned their hands palms upward to indicate that they did not know.

"I will tell you. In old days one lamp was the strength of family feeling. All the family were bound together and shared all things, and when one suffered, all suffered. Then there was the lamp of caste brotherhood. I know it was narrow, but within those limits a man had security and friendship. Another lamp was the simplicity of life. Wants were few, and content was blessed. Beside this lamp shone the lamp of good craftsmanship. To make something well with the hands was a deep satisfaction to the spirit. And then there was the lamp of religion. Every day in all actions religion entered in, and there was no division into what was sacred and secular."

"But, padre-ji," one of the girls broke in, "you would not have us hold back this new teaching and not give it to the villages? We have it ourselves and we want to share it with them."

"It is our service to our country," added an ardent young nationalist. "We believe that our motherland calls us to serve her in this way instead of boycotting foreign cloth and demonstrating in processions. We must build our nation by these means."

"All this is true, my children," said the old man. "And I do not want you to withhold the new teaching. Only remember that bright new lamps make old lamps look very dim. They lose their light. If you give something new to the village people you also take something away, for often the new and the old cannot exist together. New ideas are like ferment in the toddy which can make men drunk. It bubbles up in their minds, it makes them uneasy, it makes them doubt the wisdom of their fathers, it takes away security. I ask our young Christian teachers, 'Why do you tell people to save money? To become rich and fat?' In India

in old days poverty was a sign of holiness. A holy man wished to be without possessions. Now many men desire wealth. Is wealth the same as blessedness? You will say, 'But you are a Christian padre and you ought to know.' I believe that in Christ is the way of blessedness. Do not many Hindus revere Him for His life and teaching? But all these new ideas make it difficult for Christians as well as for others. You will see many changes yet to come. I only think on them. Bless you, my children. Go in peace."

#### NUMBERING THE PEOPLE

Into the midst of the villages in all parts of India changes are coming. In a blue book published every year by the Government of India called *The Material and Moral Progress of India* many of these changes in villages and towns are described. Motor buses rumble and snort into areas far from railways. New forms of ploughs, new types of seeds, new breeds of bulls are introduced into the countryside. New schools and hospitals are opened. All this spells "Progress" for the nation, as the schoolgirls in Bengal were eager to point out. But as the old padre showed, together with progress may go a profound malaise, when the old lamps grow dim and flicker out, when the old order is changing and the new order is as yet unformed.

Beneath the external changes such as motor buses and new ploughs, two significant inner changes are going on which are at variance with each other. On the one hand modern education and modern economic life are producing a new kind of individualism. A young man may not wish to follow his father's trade; he may strike out on his own lines and in so doing may

break away from the social group to which he belonged. The old communal life in which the members of a group, whether family, village, caste, or tribe, were bound together is slowly being broken up. While this change is going on at the bottom among the people as a whole, at the top the political leaders of India are attempting to unite all the people into one nation. Enough has been said already about the diversity of races, languages, castes, and religious communities in India, to indicate that the task of making them all into one united nation is a colossal one. In the past a superficial unity was created by a conquering power. Now the time has come for the unity to be created from within by Indians who see before them the task of nation-building.

The situation might perhaps be summed up in general terms. While in the social and religious spheres inevitable changes are taking place which disintegrate group life and give individuals a feeling of unrest and insecurity, in the political sphere attempts are being made to integrate and unify the people. Much is said and written of the conflict between Hindus and Moslems and between the higher castes and the depressed classes, and of the political necessity for resolving such conflicts in the interests of the nation. But such political strife has another and more fundamental aspect. Beneath the troubled surface of politics lie the more deeply troubled layers of social and economic and religious changes which are making individuals and groups uneasy and dissatisfied, sometimes even uprooted from all that gave them security in the past.

In the ten yearly Census Reports can be read the tale of India's numbers. In the 1931 Census, her population was 352,837,778, having increased since 1921 by



33,895,298, or at the rate of over three million a year.<sup>1</sup> The Census Reports give information of the distribution of people by town and country, by sex, by religion, by occupation, and by literacy. It is this last heading which is one of the most important in the building of the nation, and yet we see from the Census Reports that the numbers of literate men and women show a very small increase in the past ten years ; in other words, that education has done little more than keep pace with the increase of population. Ultimately the success of a democratic government will depend on the education of the people. Farmers, uneducated in the technical sense, may manage their village affairs effectively without being literate, but in the wider sphere of government some measure of education is essential.

As important as the education of the masses is their health and their food supply. Much has been said and written on the poverty of the Indian masses, but figures of relative incomes and wages mean little to people in the West where the standard of life is so different. To Indian peasants, however, poverty means a continual state of not having enough to eat, and very often a load of debt. Following hard on that comes physical liability to disease, coupled with ignorance of how to deal with illness and a belief that it is their fate and therefore inescapable. The making of the Indian nation is only in part political. Its foundations must be laid in the welfare of the masses of the people, and a step towards this welfare is to battle with the three spectres of poverty, disease and ignorance, which dominate the villages.

<sup>1</sup> For distribution of population and other statistical information, see map at end.

## SOCIAL SERVICE

It has been shown in Chapter VI how part of the machinery of government is related to the needs of the people through the services of public health and education and co-operative work. The experience of other countries has been, however, that in the task of social reform the work of volunteer agencies is essential to support and often to lead official action. This is no less true in India, and from the days of the Reform movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Indian enterprise and initiative has been devoted to social reform along many lines. It is not possible here to describe the many forms of social service which have been carried out by Indians since the early days of the Brahmo Samaj, some along orthodox Hindu lines, some directly aiming at abolishing caste barriers and untouchability. Among these forms of Indian social service two will be mentioned which have been established for a number of years.

In 1905 Mr G. K. Gokhale, the President of the Indian National Congress, founded the Servants of India Society. In the task of nation-building in India, Mr Gokhale recognized the need for social service workers who were specially trained and who came to their work in a truly devoted spirit. Hence he declared in the preamble to the rules that :

The Servants of India Society will train men prepared to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit, and will seek to promote, by all constitutional means, the national interests of the Indian people. Its members will direct their efforts principally towards (1) creating among the people, by example and by precept, a deep and passionate love of the Mother-

land, seeking its highest fulfilment in service and sacrifice ; (2) organizing the work of political education and agitation, basing it on a careful study of public questions, and strengthening generally the public life of the country ; (3) promoting relations of cordial goodwill and co-operation among the different communities ; (4) assisting educational movements, especially those for the education of women, the education of backward classes, and industrial and scientific education ; (5) helping forward the industrial development of the country ; (6) the elevation of the depressed classes.

A member joining the Society took these pledges :

1. That the country will always be first in his thoughts, and that he will give to her service the best that is in him.
2. That in serving the country he will seek no personal advantage for himself.
3. That he will regard all Indians as brothers, and will work for the advancement of all, without distinction of caste and creed.
4. That he will be content with such provision for himself and his family as the society may be able to make, and that he will devote no part of his energies to earning money for himself.
5. That he will lead a pure personal life.
6. That he will engage in no personal quarrel with anyone.
7. That he will always keep in view the aims of the society, and watch over its interests with the utmost zeal, doing all he can to advance its work ; and that he will never do anything which is inconsistent with the objects of the society.

Since its foundation the Society has shown a great record of self-denying service. Its work has included rural reconstruction work, and also work among the factory population of the large cities in the Bombay

Presidency ; and in the latter it has led the way towards trade union organization among the factory workers, a much-needed movement in Indian industrial life. The Society also has a women's branch, the Seva Sadan, doing special work for women through trained and devoted workers.

In the bare rolling country of West Bengal are to be found a group of buildings amid groves of trees. Beneath two tall trees stands an upright stone on which is engraved in Sanskrit characters a verse from the Upanishad :

*He is the Repose of my Life,  
The Joy of my Heart,  
The Peace of my Spirit.*

Here the Maharshi (Great Saint) Debendranath Tagore founded an *ashram* (a secluded place) where he could worship and meditate ; and here his famous son, Rabindranath Tagore, the poet, founded his school and called it Santiniketan, the abode of peace. His ideal was a school in which the education given would combine some of the old Indian traditions of learning and the study of India's past with the new teaching of the West. In harmony with Indian traditions the school has many classes out of doors under the trees, and at all times Nature is one of the school's chief teachers. In music and art the children grow up to appreciate their own traditional art and to express themselves as creative artists in whatever realm they show promise. Allied to the school at Santiniketan is the rural community centre at Sriniketan. Here classes in reading and writing for the villagers are combined with practical instruction in agriculture, dairying, weaving and other industries. Most important of all are the

measures taken to help the villagers to improve their health and to teach them elementary sanitation. The village boys are trained in an adapted form of Scout movement to render social service to the villagers around, and to act as volunteer "police" at the big fairs held in the neighbourhood when hundreds of people come together for several days.

In this movement for social service, and particularly in rural community work, the Christian Church is playing a notable part, encouraging such work through the National Christian Council. One rural school and training centre, Moga in the Punjab, has become famous for its experiment in a type of education which is adapted to the needs of the village communities. Other "Mogas," that is, rural training schools on similar lines, have been started by the Christian Church in other parts of India. To them come teachers who, when trained, go back to the villages to make the village school into a centre for the community. The teaching of the children is thus related to improvements in health, in agriculture, in village hygiene, as well as to the need of acquiring reading and writing and arithmetic. It is moreover realized that character training is essential if such schools are to be of lasting influence. In Moga and other Christian schools this is part of the Christian teaching of the school.

In the extreme south of India, in Travancore, lies the village of Martaban. Here the Y.M.C.A. has a rural demonstration centre where adult education, health services and co-operative work have gone hand in hand towards the betterment of a wide area. Not only co-operative credit societies to lend the necessary advances to the villagers without recourse to the moneylender, but co-operative marketing schemes have been put to

the test, and have shown beyond doubt that in the villagers' spare time from his fields he can raise crops and make goods which add materially to his income. It has been shown here too, how increased prosperity and freedom from debt lead to a more vigorous interest in the village panchayets, in village drama and other recreations, and in agricultural shows and fairs. The Y.M.C.A. has given special attention to the training of leaders for this work, both paid workers such as school teachers, and volunteer workers who will serve the co-operative societies and give a lead in all projects for rural betterment. Here the organizers and workers are all Christians, many of them from the Syrian Christian Church of Travancore said to have been founded in the second century A.D. Many Hindus, however, have been brought into touch with the centre, attracted both by the material success and by the spiritual aims of the work.

#### THE SOUL OF THE NATION

Not only Indian social reformers but Indian poets and philosophers and saints of all ages have insisted that man is more than a material being, that he has a spirit which asks, "What is the meaning of life? What is good?" Beneath all the material progress and change necessary to the building of the nation lies the insistent question: what of the soul of the nation? How shall it be cared for? In the past, Indian thinkers and sages held that the things of the spirit were of greater importance than the things of the flesh. Alike to wealthy rulers and merchants and to struggling peasants they said that the road to salvation lay in suffering and in poverty and in the denial of all desire.

And now? In the midst of material change, outward "progress," new forms of political and social free-

dom, what has happened to the beliefs of the people, and to their scale of values? Will they become materialistic, and reject spiritual values as having no place in this modern world? Can they abolish old forms of social and economic and religious life, and keep the old beliefs which animated them? If not, what will take their place?

On the canal banks a cow was grazing. A woman was cutting grass and piling it on a cloth to carry home. A fat little boy astride a shalti was kicking his heels in the water. An old man, poling a dug-out, came in sight.

"Hail, great uncle," said the child. "How is your rice?"

"When the sun shines and the waters stand in the field, with the blessing of the gods the rice grows and comes to full ear. Greeting, daughter of my sister. How is your cow?"

"When there is grass to eat and rain to make it sweet, the cow gives good milk. So also my son becomes fat."

"The rice, the cow, the child, the blessing of the gods—this is our land and our life. Go in peace."

With this the old man pushed his boat away, and the child called, "Go in peace."



## GLOSSARY

(Vowels are pronounced as in Italian, e.g. e=a, as in day ; i=ee, as in seen ; ā=a, as in father ; a=u, as in butter.)

*bidi*, small cigarette

*bābū*, educated man

*bhajan*, song or chant, often a form of Christian hymn in N. India

*chapāti*, flat scone baked on iron plate

*chārpoī*, bed of wooden frame interlaced with webbing

*chela*, attendant of a holy man

*dhōti*, man's cotton cloth worn round waist covering thighs

*ghāri*, carriage

*gbāt*, (*lit.*) step. Also used for edge of mountainous land

*ghi*, clarified butter

*-ji*, honorific prefix

*jungle*, any rough land, not necessarily forest

*karma*, fate

*khaddar*, homespun cotton

*lāthi*, pole, leaded at one end

*lōg*, people

*maidān*, field

*mela*, festival

*mems*, married ladies

*panchāyet*, group of five

*purdah*, (*lit.*) curtain. Used for seclusion of women

*puja*, worship. Also used for festival

*pundit*, teacher

*rel-ghari*, train

*rupae*, rs. 6d.

*sādbu*, holy man, ascetic

*sāri*, women's dress of 5-9 yards of cotton or silk

*serai*, rest house for travellers

*shalti*, punt-shaped river boat

*sirdār*, headman

*sonar*, goldsmith

*toddy*, intoxicating drink made from palms

*Vedas*, ancient sacred books of Hindus



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## TABLE OF INFORMATION

AREA . . . . .	All India	British India	Indian States
in square miles	1,808,679	1,096,171	712,508
POPULATION . . . . .	352,837,778	271,526,933	81,310,845
Urban . . . . .	38,979,211		
Rural . . . . .	313,858,567		

### OCCUPATIONS :

Agricultural workers . . . . .	66.4 per cent
Trade . . . . .	5.13 ..
Transport . . . . .	1.52 ..
Industries (jute, cotton, mines, plantations, etc.) . . . . .	9.95 ..

### RELIGIONS per 1000 of the population :

Hindu . . . . .	682	Tribal religions, 24	Christians . . . . .	18
Moslem . . . . .	222	(sometimes	Others . . . . .	18
Buddhist . . . . .	36	called Animist)	(Sikh, Jain, Parsi, etc.)	

### LITERACY :

156 per 1000 males	
29 per 1000 females	
Total literate population . . . . .	23,962,279 males 4,169,036 females

### LANGUAGES :

- 225 exclusive of dialects
- (150 of these are tribal languages in Assam and Burma)
- 20 different scripts





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